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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No. 1405.1025/JDH

First Named Inventor or Application Identifier:

Noboru IWAYAMA, et al.

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APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

ADDRESS TO: **Assistant Commissioner for Patents
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1. Fee Transmittal Form
2. Specification, Claims & Abstract [Total Pages: 87]
3. Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) [Total Sheets: 25]
4. Oath or Declaration [Total Pages: 4]
 a. Newly executed (original or copy)
 b. Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d)) (for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed)
 i. DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)
 Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application,
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5. Incorporation by Reference (usable if Box 4b is checked)
 The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby incorporated by reference therein.
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ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

8. Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))
9. 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement (when there is an assignee) Power of Attorney
10. English Translation Document (if applicable)
11. Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 Copies of IDS Citations
12. Preliminary Amendment
13. Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503) (Should be specifically itemized)
14. Small Entity Statement(s) Statement filed in prior application, status still proper and desired.
15. Certified Copy of Priority Document(s) (if foreign priority is claimed)
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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

**NEW APPLICATION
FEE TRANSMITTAL**

Attorney Docket No. 1405.1025/JDH

Application Number UNASSIGNED

Filing Date August 31, 2000

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FEE CALCULATION (fees effective 10/01/97)

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				BASIC FILING FEE	690.00
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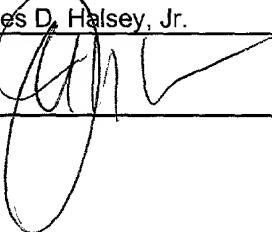
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SUBMITTED BY: STAAS & HALSEY

Typed Name	James D. Halsey, Jr.	Reg. No.	22,729
Signature		Date	August 31, 2000

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of:)
Noboru IWAYAMA, et al.) Group Art Unit: To Be Assigned
Serial No.: To Be Assigned)
Filed: August 31, 2000) Examiner: To Be Assigned
For: COMMUNICATION MEANS)
NOTIFICATION METHOD AND)
NOTIFICATION SYSTEM)

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

*Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231*

Sir:

Before examination of the above-identified application, please amend the application as follows:

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please AMEND the claims as follows:

Claim 16, line 3, change "the foregoing claims 12-15" to --claim 12--.

Claim 27, line 4, change "any of the foregoing claims 19-26" with --claim 19--.

REMARKS

This Preliminary Amendment is submitted to improve the form of the claims as originally filed.

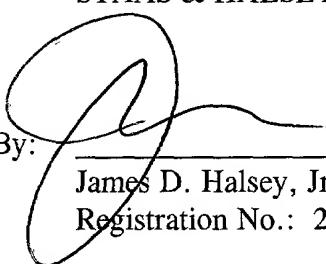
It is respectfully requested that this Preliminary Amendment be entered in the above-referenced application.

If any further fees are required in connection with the filing of this Preliminary Amendment, please charge same to our Deposit Account No. 19-3935.

Respectfully submitted,

STAAS & HALSEY LLP

By:


James D. Halsey, Jr.
Registration No.: 22,729

Date: 8/31/12

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

**COMMUNICATION MEANS NOTIFICATION METHOD AND NOTIFICATION
SYSTEM**

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 **Technical Field**

The present invention relates to communication systems wherein users communicate amongst themselves utilizing information terminals on a network carrying a plurality of communication means. More specifically, among such communication systems, it relates to a communication system wherein users can select communication means ahead of initiating communication.

10 **Description of Related Art**

In recent years, various types of communication means have been installed in information terminals on networks: telephone functions, email devices, instant messaging devices. Examples of this sort of information terminal include, for example, the PC (personal computer), WS (work station), portable telephones, and portable information terminals used in PHS (Japan's personal handy-phone system, comparable to PCS, personal communications service in the United States). When communication is called for, users make use of the various types of communication means to suit their situations, circumstances or preferences.

Given this situation, when requesting communication it is necessary to consider the status or circumstances of the party from which communication is requested, not just the party requesting communication. In Laid-Open Patent Application 1995-250132 and Laid-Open Patent Application 1996-140158 a user registers the communication means he himself uses in advance. When a user requests communication with another user, notification occurs as to whether or not it is possible to communicate with a communication means registered by the other user.

Also, Laid-Open Patent Application 1998-55492 provides technology whereby a communication means usage possibility indication is dynamically modified according to changes in the communication means that a party can use, and before communication begins the party is notified of usable communication means. In this invention each user registers usable communication means for specified statuses in advance. Communication means usable by the user who is designated the communication destination (simply "destination user" hereinafter) are reported to the party requesting communication in accordance with that user's status.

All of the foregoing art displays only the destination user's usable communication means. Therefore the user who is sending a communication request (simply "source user"

hereinafter) to someone must search the other party's usable communication means for communication means which he himself can use. This puts a heavy burden on the user in matching the other party's circumstances when he wants to

5 communicate, and is troublesome and inconvenient for the user. Also, the destination user's usable communication means are not necessarily those that the source user can simultaneously use.

On the other hand, when the destination user does not have the communication means that the source user wants to use, if the destination user does not download the communication means from a communication means provider, communication through that communication means cannot occur. Therefore the source user must use other communication means

10 and ask the destination user to install the desired communication means and have the destination user report completion of the installation. Expanding communication means when one wants to start communicating places a great burden on the user and interferes with smooth communication.

15

20 In addition, in recent years there have been many cases in which one user uses a plurality of user terminals and uses a plurality of terminals to suit the user's status. For example, a portable terminal is used while on the go, and different computers are used at the office and home.

25 Under these conditions, even if it is known that a

communication means can or cannot be used at one terminal, if the same sort of information is not known for the communication means at another terminal it is difficult to perform communication that takes into account the other 5 party's status.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to consider the situation at both the source user end and the destination user end and display communication means usable at both 10 ends.

Another object of the present invention is to provide technology for performing communications wherein meanwhile the communication means are readily extended.

An additional object of the present invention is to 15 present communication means responsive to an environment in which one user uses a plurality of terminals.

In order to resolve the foregoing issues, the invention in a first aspect provides a communication means reporting method used in a communication system that selectively uses 20 communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises the steps of:

A. Associating operable communication means in each user's information terminal with users, and storing this 25 information,

B. Receiving a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication,

C. Creating a list, based on the stored information, describing communication means that are operable at both the 5 destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal, and

D. Reporting the foregoing list to the source user before communication begins.

Usable communication means at each user's information 10 terminal are associated with each user in advance, and that information is stored. When a source user specifies a destination user, a list of communication means which both parties can use is created based on the stored information. This list is sent to the source user's information terminal 15 and displayed on a display, for example. The source user selects any of the communication means from the list, and communication with the specified destination user begins.

The invention in a second aspect provides a communication means notification system used in a 20 communication system that selectively uses communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises a first table, administration means, designation means, acquisition means, creation means, and reporting means.

The first table associates communication means that are operable at each user's information terminal with users and stores that information. The administration means receives an operable communication means designation from a user and stores it in the foregoing first table. The designation means receives a destination user designation from the source user who is requesting communication. The acquisition means acquires communication means that are operable at both the source user's information terminal and the destination user's information terminal from the foregoing first table. The creation means creates, based on the acquired information, a list describing communication means usable by both the source user and the destination user. The reporting means reports the created list to the source user before communication begins.

Specifically, the source user specifies the destination user by some sort of means. Examples of specifying means include entering a telephone number, and selecting a user from a previously stored address book. The acquisition means acquires the communication means usable by both the source user and the destination user specified by the designation means respectively from the first table. The creation means creates a communication means list describing communication means that both the source user and destination user can use. The reporting means is structured

using a WWW server and WWW browser, for example. The created communication means list is displayed in the WWW browser.

The invention in a third aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect, additionally comprising a second table and priority means. The second table associates communication means usable in a specified user status with users and user status, and stores this information. The priority means receives settings for communication means usable in a specified user status and stores it in the second table.

In addition, in this system the foregoing first table stores user status in addition to communication means. The foregoing administration means receives the new user status setting and writes the communication means usable in the new user status to the first table in accordance with the settings of the second table.

The first table stores communication means usable by each user at that time. Therefore it can create a list of communication means that corresponds to dynamically changing user status.

The invention in a fourth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect, additionally comprising a second table and priority means. The second table associates communication

means usable in a specified user status and the foregoing priority with users and user status, and stores this information. The priority means receives communication means usable in a specified user status and a priority setting for 5 the foregoing communication means and stores these in the second table.

In addition, in this system the foregoing first table stores communication means priority and user status in addition to communication means. The foregoing 10 administration means receives the new user status setting and writes the communication means usable in the new user status and the communication means priority to the first table in accordance with the settings of the second table. The foregoing acquisition means acquires the communication 15 means usable by both the source user's information terminal and the destination user's information terminal and the communication means priority from the first table. The foregoing creation means creates the foregoing list based on the priority of communication means that both the source 20 user and destination user can use.

The user sets priorities in advance for specified statuses for the communication means that he himself uses. If the user status changes, the priority of that user's communication means changes, so the administration means 25 updates the first table. The list of communication means is

created based on the priority of communication means usable by originating and destination user, so it is possible to create a communication means list corresponding to dynamically changing user status.

5 The invention in a fifth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing fourth aspect in which the foregoing creation means reorders communication means in accordance with the source user's priority.

10 Communication means usable by both the source user and the destination user may have different priorities. In this case, the communication means list is reported in the source user's priority ranking.

15 The invention in a sixth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing fourth aspect in which the foregoing creation means reorders communication means in accordance with the destination user's priority.

20 Communication means usable by both the source user and the destination user may have different priorities. In this case, the communication means list is reported in the destination user's priority ranking.

25 The invention in a seventh aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect in which the foregoing designation means

receives designations using identification information that specifies operable communication means at the destination user's information terminal.

For example, if the communication means is IRC
5 (Internet Relay Chat), the identification information is a nickname. If the communication means is email, the identification information is an email address. If it's the telephone, it's a telephone number.

The invention in a eighth aspect provides a
10 communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect in which the foregoing designation means is able to receive a destination user designation using identification information that specifies operable communication means at the destination user's information
15 terminal, and if both the destination user and the source user can use communication means corresponding to the foregoing identification information, the foregoing creation means describes the relevant communication means at the start of the list.

20 For example, the source user specifies the destination user by entering a telephone number. If both users can use the telephone, the creation means creates a list starting with the telephone, even if there are other usable communication means.

The invention in a ninth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect in which the foregoing designation means is able to receive a destination user designation using

5 identification information that specifies operable communication means at the destination user's information terminal, and if both the destination user and the source user can use communication means corresponding to the foregoing identification information, the system

10 additionally comprises a starting means for starting communication using the relevant communication means.

For example, the source user specifies the destination user by entering a telephone number. If both users can use the telephone, the starting means starts setting up a

15 communication line using the telephone, even if there are other usable communication means.

The invention in a tenth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing second aspect in which the foregoing communication means is a game application in which a plurality of users can

20 participate on a network.

Examples of game applications for a plurality of users to participate interactively on a network include, for example, mahjong games, interactive sports games, and the

25 like.

The invention in a eleventh aspect provides a computer-readable recording medium recording a communication means reporting program used in an information terminal with a communication means installed for users to selectively communicate with one another or used in an information terminal that can communicate with the foregoing information terminal; the foregoing communication means reporting program executes the following stages:

- A. Preparing a first table that associates operable communication means in each user's information terminal with users, and stores this information,
- B. Receiving an operable communication means setting from a user and storing it in the foregoing first table,
- C. Receiving a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication,
- D. Acquiring communication means that are operable at both the source user's information terminal and the destination user's information terminal from the foregoing first table,
- E. Creating a list, based on the acquired information, describing communication means usable by both the source user and the destination user, and
- F. Reporting the created list to the source user before communication begins.

This has the same sort of operating effect as the foregoing second aspect.

The invention in a twelfth aspect provides a communication means reporting method used in a communication system that selectively uses communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises the steps of:

A. Associating operable communication means in each user's information terminal with users, and storing this information,

B. Receiving a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication,

C. Creating a first list, based on the stored information, describing communication means that are operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal,

D. Creating a second list describing communication means which are present at either the destination or source user's information terminal and not at the other, and which can be downloaded to the terminal that does not have the relevant communication means and can be executed at the terminal, and

E. Reporting a third list that combines the first list and the second list to the source user before communication begins.

The first list describes communication means that both the originating and destination user have. The second list describes communication means that one has and the other doesn't. However, the communication means described in the 5 second list are communication means that can be downloaded to the user terminal that does not have that communication means and can be executed at that terminal.

The invention in a thirteenth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing 10 twelfth aspect in which the foregoing second list includes a description of communication means which neither the destination nor source user's information terminal has, and which can be downloaded to both terminals and can be executed at both terminals.

15 For example, neither the destination nor source user has videoconference means. However, if videoconference means can be downloaded to both terminals and can be executed at both terminals, videoconference means is also described in the second list.

20 The invention in a fourteenth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing twelfth aspect in which the foregoing download conditions for downloading communication means to a user's information terminal and execution conditions for executing 25 communication means at a user's information terminal are

stored in advance for each downloadable communication means, and the second list is created based on a user's information terminal's terminal information and download conditions and execution conditions.

5 Download conditions and execution conditions for downloadable communication applications are stored in advance in a database or the like. These include, for example, empty hard disk space required for downloading, memory needed for executing the application and the like.

10 The communication means that can be executed at the user terminal are determined from among the downloadable communication applications based on terminal information such as idle memory at the user's terminal and communication application download conditions and execution conditions.

15 The invention in a fifteenth aspect provides a communication means notification system for the foregoing twelfth aspect in which selection of any of the communication means on the third list is received from the source user and the selected communication means is reported

20 to the destination user's information terminal, and if the destination user's information terminal does not have the selected communication means, the destination user's information terminal acquires the selected communication means by downloading.

More specifically, a communication application is downloaded to the destination user's terminal according to the source user's selection. The user's consent may be obtained before executing the download.

5 The invention in a sixteenth aspect provides a computer-readable recording medium recording a program for executing the communication means reporting methods set forth in the foregoing twelfth through fifteenth aspects. It achieves the same sort of operating effect as the
10 foregoing twelfth through fifteenth aspects.

15 The invention in a seventeenth aspect provides a communication means notification system used in a communication system that selectively uses communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises a first table, a designation means, a first creation means, a second creation means, and a reporting means.

20 The first table associates operable communication means in each user's information terminal with users, and stores this information. The designation means receives a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication. The first creation means creates a first list, based on the stored information, describing communication means that are operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source

user's information terminal. The second creation means creates a second list describing communication means which are present at either the destination or source user's information terminal and not at the other, and which can be 5 downloaded to the terminal that does not have the relevant communication means and can be executed at the terminal.

The reporting means reports a third list that combines the first list and the second list to the source user before communication begins.

10 This achieves the same sort of operating effect as the foregoing twelfth aspect.

The invention in an eighteenth aspect provides a communication means supply device used in the communication means notification system of the foregoing seventeenth aspect. This device comprises a creation means and a supply means. The creation means creates a list of communication means that can be downloaded to an information terminal and can be executed at the information terminal for destination users and source users respectively. The supply means 15 supplies communication means included in the foregoing list 20 to user information terminals.

The second list of the foregoing twelfth aspect is created based on the list created by this device. Also, in the twelfth aspect the communication means which the source

user selects from the third list is supplied to the source user by this device.

The invention in a nineteenth aspect provides a communication means reporting method used in a communication system that selectively uses communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises the steps of:

A. Associating operable communication means in each user's single information terminal or plurality of information terminals and terminal identification information identifying the user's information terminals with users, and storing this information,

B. Receiving a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication,

C. Creating a list, based on the stored information, describing communication means that are operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal, and

D. If a plurality of the same communication means is included in the foregoing list, adding information for identifying the information terminals to the foregoing list and reporting the foregoing list to the source user before communication begins.

For example, if the list includes telephone at the office and telephone at the lab, the list should display

"telephone @ office" and "telephone @ lab" respectively in order to distinguish them.

The invention in a twentieth aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing 5 nineteenth aspect in which a user-set message corresponding to a communication means in an information terminal is stored together with a communication means and information terminal, and a message set by the destination user is additionally included in the list reported to the source 10 user.

Examples of messages include "I'm here" and "Busy." By reporting the communication means along with a message the destination user can easily indicate his own status or desire, and this encourages smooth communication.

15 The invention in a twenty-first aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing nineteenth aspect in which the foregoing communication means operable at the same user's single information terminal or plurality of information terminals are grouped by 20 predetermined criteria, and the foregoing list is created based on the grouped communication means, and the communication means described in the foregoing list are grouped using the foregoing predetermined criteria and reported to the source user before communication begins.

For example, communication means are grouped for each category of communication means. In this case, the communication means list reported to the source user is also grouped for each category of communication means.

5 Categories of communication means include telephone, messaging, file transfer, and the like.

The invention in a twenty-second aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing twenty-first aspect in which a priority ranking is set for 10 each group in the foregoing communication means, and the foregoing list is created based on the priority ranking. For example, the list describes only each group's highest priority communication means.

15 The invention in a twenty-third aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing twenty-second aspect in which the foregoing priority ranking is set based on the sequence in which communication means became usable inside a group.

For example, the priority ranking of the communication 20 means most recently used within a group is "1."

The invention in a twenty-fourth aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing twenty-second aspect in which a recommended communication means is set for each source user in each group of the 25 foregoing communication means, and the priority ranking of

communication means for each source user is modified and the foregoing list is created. The priority ranking of communication means desired is modified for each source user.

5 The invention in a twenty-fifth aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing twenty-first aspect in which selection of any group based on the foregoing list is received from the source user, and an attempt is made to communicate with the destination user's 10 communication means included in the selected group.

For example, if telephone is selected, all of the destination user's telephones are called, and communication begins with the telephone that answers.

15 The invention in a twenty-sixth aspect provides a communication means reporting method for the foregoing twenty-first aspect in which selection of any group based on the foregoing list is received from the source user, an inquiry is made to the destination user's communication means included in the selected group as to whether it's 20 receiving or not, and communication begins with the communication means in the destination user's information terminal that is first to respond.

For example, if telephone is selected, a reception confirmation is sent to all of the destination user's

telephone terminals, and communication begins by telephone with the first terminal to respond.

The invention in a twenty-seventh aspect provides a computer-readable recording medium recording a program for 5 executing the communication means reporting methods of any of the foregoing nineteenth through twenty-sixth aspects. This recording medium achieves the same sort of operating effect as the foregoing nineteenth through twenty-sixth aspects.

10 The invention in a twenty-eighth aspect provides a communication means notification system used in a communication system that selectively uses communication means installed in information terminals in a network for users to communicate with each other; it comprises a first 15 table, a designation means, a creation means, and a reporting means.

The first table associates operable communication means in each user's single information terminal or plurality of information terminals and terminal identification 20 information identifying the user's information terminals with users, and stores this information. The designation means receives a destination user designation from a source user requesting communication. The creation means creates a list, based on the stored information, describing 25 communication means that are operable at both the

destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal. If a plurality of the same communication means is included in the foregoing list, the reporting means adds information for identifying the 5 information terminals to the foregoing list and reports the foregoing list to the source user before communication begins.

This achieves the same sort of operating effect as the 10 foregoing nineteenth aspect.

From the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, the foregoing and other objects, features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art.

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is an overall structural view of notification system in accordance with first embodiment;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing functional structure of notification device;

20 Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing functional structure of user terminal with notification device;

Fig. 4 is a conceptual diagram explaining user table in user DB 13;

25 Fig. 5 is a conceptual diagram explaining preference table in user DB 13;

Fig. 6 is a conceptual diagram explaining information in list DB 2;

Fig. 7 is an example of a candidate list display (1);

Fig. 8 is an example of a candidate list display (2);

5 Fig. 9 is an example of a candidate list display (3);

Fig. 10 is an example of a candidate list display (4);

Fig. 11 is an example of a candidate list display (5);

Fig. 12 is a example of user information setting window;

10 Fig. 13 is a flowchart showing one example of flow of processing performed by notification device;

Fig. 14 shows basic principles of a notification system in a third embodiment;

15 Fig. 15 is a functional block diagram of the notification system in the third embodiment;

Fig. 16 diagrams process flow in the third-embodiment notification system;

Fig. 17 is an example of a candidate list display in the third embodiment;

20 Fig. 18 shows basic principles of a notification system in a fifth embodiment;

Fig. 19 is a functional block diagram of the notification system in the fifth embodiment;

25 Fig. 20 is a conceptual diagram illustrating data stored in candidate DB;

Fig. 21 is a conceptual diagram illustrating data stored in group DB;

Fig. 22 is a conceptual diagram illustrating a message list;

5 Fig. 23 is a conceptual diagram illustrating data stored in contents DB;

Fig. 24 diagrams process flow in the fifth-embodiment notification system;

10 Fig. 25 diagrams process flow in a confirmation routine in the fifth-embodiment notification system;

Fig. 26 diagrams process flow in a communication status broadcast routine in the fifth-embodiment notification system;

15 Fig. 27 diagrams process flow in a communication contents acquisition routine in the fifth-embodiment notification system; and

Fig. 28 diagrams process flow in a communication acquisition log routine in the fifth-embodiment notification system.

20 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Next, a communication means notification system in accordance with the present invention shall be described in detail while presenting embodiments.

First Embodiment

Configuration

Fig. 1 is a drawing showing the overall structure of a notification system in accordance with the first embodiment.

5 In this notification system, a notification device 1, list DB 2, DBMS (Data Base Management System) 3, and user terminals 4a, b, c, and d are connected via a network 5.

The notification device 1 is both: (1) provided in a user terminal; and (2) provided in a server terminal. This 10 embodiment is an example in which the foregoing (1) and (2) notification devices 1 are intermixed. In Fig. 1 user terminals 4a and b do not have notification device 1 installed, and user terminals 4c and d have notification device 1 installed. User terminals 4a and b are portable 15 phones or PHS, for example. User terminals 4c and d are a PC or WS, for example.

Also, in the case of the notification device 1 for the latter instance (2), one notification device 1 can provide 20 centralized administration for many server terminals, or a plurality of notification devices 1 provided in a plurality of server terminals a and b respectively can provide diversified administration. Fig. 1 shows the latter structure with diversified administration.

The DBMS 3 and the list DB 2 may be connectable with 25 the notification device 1 on the network. For example, the

DBMS 3 and the list DB 2 may be in an information terminal operated by the notification device 1, or in another information terminal. The DBMS 3 and the list DB 2 are usually provided in a one-to-one relationship with a 5 plurality of notification devices 1, but a plurality may also be provided.

In Fig. 1 the notification devices 1a and 1b are provided in a one-to-one relationship with the lists DB 2a and 2b and the DBMS 3a and 3b respectively. The list DB 2a 10 and 2b store specific information related to user terminals under the administration of the notification devices 1a and 1b respectively. In other words, specific information pertaining to the user terminals 4a, b, c, and d is dispersed and stored in the list DB 2a and 2b.

15 Network 5 can be the Internet or an Intranet, a mobile communications network or the like.

(1) Notification Device

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing the functional structure of the notification device 1 and a user terminal 20 that does not have a notification device 1. Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing the functional structure of a user terminal that has a notification device 1. The notification device and user terminal have the same functions in both Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, so the structure of the notification device 1 shall be explained using Fig. 2.

The notification device 1 in Fig. 2 has an address DB 11, address administration module 12, user DB 13, receiving module 14, display module 15, acquisition module 16, creation module 17, WWW server 18, and communications module 19. Furthermore, the address administration module 12, receiving module 14, display module 15, acquisition module 16, and creation module 17 are external programs of the WWW server 18, and are linked to the WWW server 18 and operated via a CGI (Common Gateway Interface) or in a library format. Other interface programs may be used instead of CGI for the interface program between these external programs and the WWW server 18.

An address book is stored in the address DB 11. The address book (not shown in drawing) associates and stores the names and user IDs of each user's friends and acquaintances. A user ID is authorization information for universally specifying a user in the notification system.

The address administration module 12 writes to and reads from the address book according to instructions from a user terminal. Contents read by the address administration module 12 are sent to the WWW server 18 and displayed at the user terminal using a WWW browser 42 to be described later. The address DB 11 and the address administration module 12 are not always required, but if provided they are convenient when the user specifies the destination user.

The user DB 13 stores specific information pertaining to users. Fig. 4 is a diagram giving a conceptual explanation of a user table stored in the user DB 13. The user table stores user ID, user name, user status, 5 communication means, whether or not the communication means is usable, attribute information, and communication conditions. This information is user information corresponding to user terminals 4a and b, which do not have a notification device 1.

10 "User ID," like the user ID in the address book, is identification information for universally specifying a user in this system.

15 "User name" describes the name of the user corresponding to user terminals 4a and b, which do not have a notification device 1.

20 "User status" describes the latest user status of each user. User status is selectively set from predetermined statuses. Examples of specified statuses are "online," "busy," "away," and "offline." User status can be entered and set. For example, Fig. 4 shows that the status of user "Taro Suzuki" is "online," and the status of "Hanako Yamada" is "busy."

25 "Communication means" describes the operable communication means at each user's terminal. For example,

Fig. 4 shows that communication using email, chat, instant message, telephone, and videoconference is possible at the terminal of user "Taro Suzuki." Furthermore, chat is a communication means in which a plurality of users share the 5 same virtual channel, and can send and receive text messages in real time. Instant message is a communication means in which user terminals can send and receive text messages in real time on a one-to-one basis.

Communication means are not particularly limited; in 10 addition to the foregoing they may include any communication means that can be installed in an information terminal, such as FTP (File Transport Protocol) devices, game applications, and the like. It is also possible to list communication means that cannot be used on the terminal at that point in 15 time, or applications that are usable through downloading from the network. In the following explanation, this sort of application is simply referred to as a downloadable application.

"Usable?" describes whether or not a communication 20 means in a user's terminal is usable or not, in accordance with user status; it may be described as either usable or not. For example, Fig. 4 shows that user "Taro Suzuki" can communicate using email, chat, instant message, and telephone, and cannot communicate using videoconference.

"Attribute information" can store optional information pertaining to the communication means. For example, in Fig. 4 it stores text data showing where the communication means is used. Also, a user can list a text message that he wants 5 to report to his selected destination as attribute information.

"Communication conditions" store the communication conditions necessary for beginning communication when actually using the communication means operating at the user 10 terminal. Examples of communication conditions include communication address, transmission rate, and the like.

In addition to the foregoing information, it is possible to store other information in the user table as required, of course. For example, a terminal name for 15 identifying the user terminal can be stored.

Fig. 5 is a diagram giving a conceptual explanation of a preference table stored in the user DB 13. The preference table associates and stores user ID, user name, communication means, user status, and priority.

20 "User ID," "user name," and "communication means" describe the same contents as the contents of the user table shown in the foregoing Fig. 4.

"User status" and "priority" store the specified user status and the priority of the communication means in that 25 status in accordance with user settings. For example, in

Fig. 5 "Taro Suzuki" has set priority "2" in the status "online" for the communication means "email," and has set priority "1" for other statuses. Also, he has set priority "1" in the status "online" for "instant message." Fig. 5 5 shows that the priority of communication means for "Taro Suzuki" in "online" status is as follows.

Priority 1: Instant messaging

Priority 2: Email, chat, telephone

Priority 3: Videoconferencing

10 Furthermore, in this embodiment any of "1," "2," or "3" can be set as priorities.

15 The receiving module 14 receives settings for the user table or preference table from the user terminal, and stores them in each table in the user DB 13. If a user status is stored in the user table, the receiving module 14 decides whether or not a communication means corresponding to the user status can be used, and updates "usable?" Also, when a user status or communication means recorded in the user table changes, the receiving module 14 updates the list DB 2 20 (to be described later) in accordance with the preference table. As described later, this is because the list DB 2 stores whether or not a communication means can be used at each user's terminal and its priority in accordance with the latest user status.

The display module **15** receives a user ID specified as a destination from the user terminal via the WWW server **18**, and reports it to the acquisition module **16**. The display module **15** also sends the user terminal a communication means 5 candidate list created by the creation module **17** via the WWW server **18**. As described later, this communication means candidate list lists communication means that both the source user and destination user can use.

The acquisition module **16** receives the destination 10 user's user ID from the display module **15**, and if it is a user ID within the local server terminal, reports it to the DBMS **3**; if the ID is not in the local server terminal, acquisition module **16** reports this to the server terminal having jurisdiction. Also, the acquisition module **16** 15 receives a candidate list of communication means usable by the destination user (hereinafter "destination candidate list") from the DBMS **3** in the local server terminal or in the server terminal that is administering the destination user's information, and sends it to the creation module **17**.

The creation module **17** determines the communication 20 means that the source user can use, based on the user table and preference table, and creates a communication source candidate table in which these communication means are listed. Next, the creation module **17** creates a candidate 25 list listing the communication means that the source user

and destination user can use, based on the communication destination and communication source candidate lists. The creation module 17 can also rearrange the communication means on the candidate list based on communication source and communication destination priority.

5 The WWW server 18 receives the communication means candidate list from the display module 15, and sends it to the WWW browser 42 at the source user's terminal. The WWW server 18 also receives the address book from the address 10 administration module 12, and sends it to the WWW browser 42 at the user terminal. It should be understood that instead of the WWW server 18 it is also possible to provide an application for a specialized notification device that has the same function, and supply the candidate list or address 15 book to the user terminal.

The communications module 19 receives from the source user terminal the results of selecting communication means from the candidate list. The communications module 19 reads the selected communication means' communication conditions 20 from the user table for the source user. Next, the communications module 19 reports the necessary settings to the notification device 1 administering the source user's terminal. Necessary settings include transmission rate adjustments, acquisition of participation channel names, and 25 acquisition of intercommunication addresses. In addition,

the communications module 19 reports the necessary settings to the user terminal. Subsequently, the user terminal activates the communication means using the set communication conditions and communication begins.

5 (2) List DB and DBMS

Fig. 6 is a diagram giving a conceptual explanation of the information stored in the list DB 2. The list DB 2 associates and stores user ID, user name, status, communication means, usable?, priority, and attribute information. "User ID," "user name," "user status," "communication means," "usable?," and "attribute information" match the same information in the user table in the user DB 13.

"Priority" describes priority in accordance with user
15 status, based on each user's preference table. For example,
Fig. 6 is set to show an example in which the status of user
"Taro Suzuki" is "online"; the priority of each
communication means is displayed based on the contents of
the preference table.

20 Furthermore, in addition to the previously described information, other information as required can be stored in the list DB 2, of course.

The DBMS 3 reads and writes the list DB 2.
Specifically, when the DBMS 3 receives a new user status or
25 new communication means setting from the foregoing receiving

module 14 in the notification device 1, it updates the list DB 2 based on that information. Also, when a user ID is received from the acquisition module 16, the DBMS 3 searches the list DB 2 using the user ID as a key, and sends the 5 acquisition module 16 usable communication means and their status for the relevant user. Of course, DBMS 3 can also search the list DB 2 using information other than user ID, such as user name, as the key.

(3) User Terminal

10 The user terminals 4a and 4b have a settings module 41, WWW browser 42, input/output module 45, startup module 43, and communication application 44.

The settings module 41 receives input of specified user information, and sends it to the notification device 1.

15 User information is information set in the user table or preference table. The settings module 41 can also automatically detect user status from among user information by a predetermined method. Also, the settings module 41 displays a previously prepared window in input/output module 20 45, and receives input of the foregoing user information.

This window shall be described later.

The WWW browser 42 sends address book display requests to the notification device 1, and outputs the address book sent in response to the foregoing request to the 25 input/output module 45. The WWW browser 42 also receives

the candidate list from the notification device 1, and displays it in the input/output module 45. Furthermore, a display application specialized for a notification device can be installed at the user terminal instead of the WWW 5 browser 42.

The startup module 43 reports the communication means selected from the candidate list displayed at input/output module 45 to the notification device 1. The startup module 43 also receives communication conditions from the 10 notification device 1. Next, the startup module 43 transfers the communication conditions to the communication application 44 corresponding to the selected communication means, and starts the communication application 44. Examples of the communication application 44 include email 15 devices, chat clients, instant messaging devices, and FTP devices. Starting the communication application 44 begins communication between the destination user and the source user.

(4) Notification Device in User Terminal

20 Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing the functional structure of the notification device 1 and user terminals 4c and d when the notification device 1 is provided in the user terminal. With the exception of providing a display control module 46 instead of the WWW server 18 and the WWW browser

42, the configuration is likewise as with the notification device 1 and user terminal in Fig. 2.

The display control module 46 has functions combining the WWW server 18 and the WWW browser 42. That is, the 5 display control module 46 outputs the address book sent from the address administration module 12 and the candidate list sent from the display module 15 to the input/output module 45.

Furthermore, if the notification device 1 is provided 10 in the user terminal, only information relating to the user using the user terminal is stored in the address book, user table, and preference table.

Screen Examples

(1) Candidate List Display Example

15 Fig. 7-11 are examples of displaying candidate lists of communication means displayed at the user terminal in this embodiment of a notification system.

Fig. 7 is an example of a candidate list displayed when the source and destination user's user terminals are 20 connected to a network, i.e., are online. In the picture, the information terminal name "SubPC" is displayed after the "@" mark in the list of communication means.

In addition, the information attribute "(for Office)" is displayed after the information terminal name.

25 Downloadable communication means are displayed in italics.

The display method that is "downloadable" is displayed only when downloadable functions are present, and when this function is selected a list of downloadable applications is displayed. Also, as shown in Fig. 7, 8, 10, and 11, the 5 list of downloadable applications may be displayed with the usable communication means.

Fig. 8 is an example of the candidate list displayed when the source user is online and the destination user terminal is disconnected from the network, i.e., is offline. 10 The displayed communication means are only the communication services provided by the server.

Fig. 9 shows a display example when attribute information is not displayed and only the communication means are displayed.

15 Fig. 10 is a display example when one user has a plurality of information terminals and the display distinguishes among the respective information terminals. For example, in Fig. 10 the source user has the two user terminals "SubPC" and "PC," and can do file transfer at the 20 respective terminals.

Fig. 11 is a screen example showing a display example of other attribute information. The message "Please send here" is displayed after the communication means as attribute information.

25 (2) User Information Setting Window

Fig. 12 is an example of a window for inputting user information at the user terminal. A terminal name setting column 121, communication means setting column 122, status setting button 123, disable button 124, and comment column 5 125 are displayed in Fig. 12.

The terminal name setting column 121 is a field for setting the user terminal name for identifying user terminals.

The communication means setting column 122 is a field 10 for setting operable communication means at the user terminal displayed at the terminal name setting column 121.

The status setting button 123 is a button for setting whether or not the communication means displayed in the communication means setting column 122 is usable; it is set 15 for each status. In the picture, "FileTransfer" is set to be usable in the statuses "online," "away," and "offline." Conversely, "FileTransfer" is set so it cannot be used in "busy."

The disable button 124 is a button used when the user 20 wants to avoid communicating using a communication means displayed in the communication means setting column 122. When this disable button 124 is pressed, communication using the relevant communication means is set as impossible, regardless of the setting status of the status setting 25 button 123.

The comment column **125** is a field for setting attribute information. The picture shows an example in which the message "Please send here" is set as attribute information.

The user information setting window is preferably
5 designed to enable setting required information other than
the user information described above, in accordance with the
configuration of the user table and the preference table.

Process Flow

Next, the flow of processing performed by the foregoing
10 notification device **1** shall be specifically explained.

Furthermore, in order to simplify the explanation, a case in
which the notification device **1** is not provided in a user
terminal (Fig. 2) shall be explained, but the same sort of
processing is performed when it is provided in a user
15 terminal (Fig. 3). The following process begins when a user
terminal requests display of an address book.

In step **S1** the address administration module **12** reads
the address book from the address DB **11** and sends it to the
user terminal via the WWW server **18**. At the source user's
20 terminal, the WWW browser **42** displays the received address
book on the screen.

In step **S2** the selection by the source user of any user
as the destination user causes the display module **15** to
acquire the user ID of the selected user via the WWW server
25 **18**. Step **S3** subsequently ensues.

In step S3 the display module 15 sends the destination user's user ID to the acquisition module 16. The acquisition module 16 sends the user ID to the DBMS 3, and requests the list of communication means that the 5 destination user can use, i.e. the destination candidate list.

The DBMS 3 searches the list DB 2 with the user ID as the key, and sends the acquisition module 16 the relevant user's usable communication means and their priority. The 10 acquisition module 16 sends the acquired destination candidate list to the creation module 17.

In step S4 the creation module 17 reads the source user's usable communication means and each communication means' priority in the source user status from the user DB 15 13 and creates the originating candidate list.

In step S5 the creation module 17 creates a communication means list for sending to the display module 15. Specifically, the creation module 17 determines communication means that can be used by both the destination 20 user and the source user from the originating candidate list and the destination candidate list. Next, the determined communication means are reordered in the source user's priority ranking and become the candidate list.

In step S6 the creation module 17 sends the candidate 25 list to the display module 15. The display module 15 sends

the candidate list to the user terminal via the WWW server
18. The candidate lists exemplified by the foregoing Fig.
7-11 are displayed by the WWW browser 42 at the user
terminal.

5 Subsequently, the communication means selected by the
source user is reported from the startup module 43 to the
communications module 19. Based on the user table, the
communications module 19 negotiates with the notification
device 1 administering the destination user terminal and
10 decides the communication conditions. The startup module 43
transfers the communication conditions to the communication
application 44, and starts the communication application 44.

In this embodiment before beginning communication with
another user, the user reports the communication means that
15 are mutually usable in the status at that point in time.
Moreover, the communication means display can be made to
reflect the circumstances of the source user, such as
priority ranking and the like. Therefore the user who is
trying to communicate can decide to enable communication
20 that takes into account not just the other party's status
but also his own circumstances.

Second Embodiment

In the foregoing first embodiment the destination user
was selected by selecting any user in the address book. The
25 selected user is specified using the user ID. However,

destination user selection and designation can also be done by other methods.

For example, with a portable telephone an incoming call list in which incoming-call telephone numbers are noted is 5 routinely prepared. There are also instances in which a telephone book created by a user or a list of mail addresses is stored in the user terminal. It is also possible to indicate a destination using this information. The following sort of processing is possible in such cases.

10 First, the user's communication address is also stored in the list DB 2. When a destination user is selected using any communication address or user name, the display module 15 acquires the user name or communication address and transfers it to the acquisition module 16 and the DBMS 3. 15 However, the display module 15 also transfers an identifier indicating what the transferred information is. For example, a telephone number is transferred along with an identifier indicating that it is a telephone number.

The DBMS 3 searches the list DB 2 with a communication address, for example, as the key, and as described previously sends the destination candidate list to the acquisition module 16. Subsequent processes are the same as described previously.

Also, before searching the list DB 2, the display 25 module 15 should search the address book and find the user

13 ID, and may be set such that it will search the list DB 2
14 only if the user ID is not found.

15 In addition, if the communication means corresponding
16 to the communication address used in designating the
17 destination user is included in the created candidate list,
18 the creation module 17 may display the relevant
19 communication means at the start of the candidate list.
20 Also, in this case, the startup module 43 may automatically
21 start the relevant communication means without waiting for
22 selection of a communication means by the user.

23 This embodiment enables a user to select the
24 destination user using information usually stored at the
25 user terminal side, which increases the convenience of the
26 system even more.

27 **Third Embodiment**

28 Next, a notification system that begins communication
29 by downloading a communication means when the source user
30 terminal and/or the destination user terminal do not have
31 that communication means shall be described in detail.

32 ***Outline***

33 Fig. 14 is an explanatory view illustrating principles
34 of a notification system in this embodiment. This
35 notification system has a communication administration
36 module 121, designation module 123, acquisition module 124,
37 display module 126, selection module 127, downloading module
38

128, candidate administration module 131, and candidate DB 132. The candidate DB 132 is equivalent to the list DB in the foregoing Fig. 2.

A communication means useable at a user terminal is reported from the communication administration module 121 to the candidate administration module 131, and stored in the candidate DB 132. When a user specifies a destination user, a list ("α-list" below) of communication means useable by the destination user is sent from the candidate administration module 131 to the acquisition module 124, and displayed at the user terminal by the display module 126. If a communication means that a certain user terminal does not have is selected, the user terminal that does not have that communication means downloads the communication means using the downloading module 128. By doing so, the selected communication means is started at both user terminals, and communication begins.

By utilizing this notification system, when a user terminal does not have the selected communication means that communication means is downloaded to the user terminal. Therefore the user can begin communication using the desired communication means.

Configuration

Fig. 15 is a functional block diagram showing the structure of a notification system in accordance with the

third embodiment. This notification system 110 consists of a user terminal 120, server 130, and communication means archive 140 connected by a network such as the Internet. Furthermore, the drawing shows only one user terminal, but a plurality of user terminals is connected to the server.

The user terminal has a communication administration module 121, terminal administration module 122, designation module 123, acquisition module 124, creation module 125, display module 126, selection module 127, and downloading module 128. The communication administration module 121 reports communication means that the user terminal has to the server. The communication administration module 121 also receives a report of the communication means selected by the source user and starts that communication means. The terminal administration module 122 reports memory amount or Java™ version, for example, to the server. The designation module 123 receives the destination user designation from the user and reports it to the server.

The acquisition module 124 acquires the α -list of useable communication means at the user specified as the destination from the candidate administration module 131. The creation module creates a list of communication means that both users can use (hereinafter "candidate list") from a β -list of communication means that the source user can use and the α -list acquired from the server. The display module

126 displays the candidate list at the user terminal. The selection module 127 reports the communication means selected from the candidate list to the candidate administration module 131. The downloading module 128 5 acquires a communication means that the user terminal does not have from a communication means supplier.

The server has the candidate administration module 131, candidate DB 132, and terminal DB 133. The candidate administration module 131 stores communication means operable at each user terminal in the candidate DB 132 and stores each user terminal's terminal information in the terminal DB 133. Information stored in the candidate DB 132 10 is the same as the information in the list DB shown in the foregoing Fig. 6; at the very least, information specifying the user, communication means, and "useable?" are stored. 15 The candidate administration module 131 also acquires communication means useable by the specified destination user from the candidate DB 132 and reports this to the source user terminal. In addition, the candidate 20 administration module 131 searches the communication means archive for communication means that can be downloaded to the destination user terminal, and writes these to the α-list.

The communication means archive has a table of 25 correspondences and a program DB. Contained in the

for downloading communication means to a terminal, and the execution conditions necessary for executing the communication means at the terminal. For example, it can list the terminal memory amount necessary for downloading or 5 executing a communication means. The program DB stores an execution format of the communication means, i.e. a communication application.

Process Flow

Fig. 16 is a drawing illustrating the process flow in a 10 notification system with the foregoing configuration when the destination user terminal downloads a communication means.

When starting, the user terminal reports communication means the user terminal has to the server (#11, #12). Also, 15 if a usable communication means becomes unusable or an unusable one becomes usable, the user terminal reports that change to the server (#11, #12). As was the case in the foregoing first embodiment, switching communication means between usable and unusable may be done automatically by the 20 user terminal to correspond to changes in user status, or may be done by user input.

In addition, when starting, the user terminal reports specified terminal information to the server (#11, #12). This terminal information, as described later, is 25 information used for deciding whether or not a communication

means can operate at a user terminal. For example, if a user terminal receives a Java™ applet, the Java™ version and memory amount are reported to the server.

The server receives communication means and terminal information (#13), and writes it to the candidate DB 132 and the terminal DB 133 (#14). When the server receives a change in communication means usable/unusable status from the user terminal, the details thereof are written to the candidate DB 132. In this way the candidate DB 132 stores the latest information about whether or not a communication means at a terminal is usable.

If a user specifies a destination user after the user terminal starts (#15), the server reads the destination user terminal's terminal information from the terminal DB 133 (#16, #17). Specifying the destination user may be done using a WWW server and WWW browser in the same manner as in the foregoing first embodiment. This may also be done by inputting the user name or a user ID previously attached to the user.

The server searches for communication means that can be executed at that terminal, based on the destination user's terminal information and the correspondence table in the communication means archive (#18). The server also refers to the candidate DB 132 and creates a list of usable communication means at the destination user's terminal. In

communication means at the destination user's terminal. In addition, the server also creates the α -list, to which is added the foregoing communication means search results and useable communication means in the candidate DB 132, and 5 sends it to the source user terminal (#19).

Upon receiving the α -list, the source user terminal creates the β -list of useable communication means from among the communication means at the local terminal, and extracts communication means that are on both the α -list and the β -list and creates the candidate list (#20, #21). The 10 candidate list is displayed at the user terminal (#21). If any of the communication means on the candidate list is selected, the selected communication means is reported to the server. Presently, a communication means that the 15 source user terminal has and the destination user terminal does not yet have but which can be downloaded and executed is selected.

When the communication means is selected, the communication means and conditions necessary for 20 communication are both reported to the server. The conditions are data transfer rate or the server name used in communication, for example. Also, the selected communication means is started at the source user terminal (#23).

#25). The destination user terminal downloads the communication means--that is, a communication application--from a communication means supplier, and starts it (#26, #27, #28). In this way communication begins between the 5 source user terminal and the destination user terminal using the selected communication means.

Furthermore, before downloading the communication means to the destination user terminal, the user terminal can carry out a confirmation process with the user. For 10 example, when the user terminal receives a report of a communication means from the server, it displays a screen message such as "User A requests communication using BBB. Do you want to download it?" Then, depending on the user's response to this message, the download is executed or 15 interrupted. If the download is interrupted, the reason therefor should be reported to the source user terminal via the server.

Screen Example

Fig. 17 is an example of a candidate list displayed on 20 a user terminal in the foregoing notification system. In Fig. 17(a), communication means that the destination user terminal does not have but which can be executed if downloaded are initially displayed as "downloadable." Then, when "downloadable" is selected, the executable 25 communication means are individually displayed.

when "downloadable" is selected, the executable communication means are individually displayed.

In Fig. 17(b) the communication means that can be executed at the destination user terminal are displayed 5 along with communication means that already exist. However, "downloadable" is displayed after the communication means name, making it possible to identify communication means that haven't been installed yet. Here it is also possible not to have the description "downloadable." In this case, 10 as in Fig. 7 in the foregoing first embodiment, the downloadable communication means can be displayed in italics, and do not need a description to distinguish them from other communication means.

Fourth Embodiment

15 (A) In the foregoing third embodiment, the user terminal merges the α -list of communication means that the destination user can use and the β -list of communication means that the source user can use. However, this processing can also be done by the server. In that case, 20 providing a creation module at the user terminal is unnecessary.

(B) In the foregoing third embodiment, both a correspondence table and a program DB are provided in the communication means archive. However, they may be provided 25 separately, or may be provided in the server.

(C) In explaining the foregoing third embodiment, the case in which the source user terminal already had the communication means, and the destination user terminal did not have it but the source user selected an executable communication means, was described. However, the same sort of processing can be done in the opposite situation.

It is also possible for the candidate list to describe communication means that neither the source user nor the destination user terminal has. In such a case, for example, 10 the source user terminal sends its local terminal information to the communication means archive and obtains a list of executable communication means. The source user terminal adds useable communication means that it already has at the local terminal and creates the β -list. In 15 addition, the source user terminal creates the candidate list from the shared parts of the α -list sent from the server and creates the β -list.

However, there is a possibility that the number of types of communication means executable at both user 20 terminals is very large. Therefore a priority ranking should be applied to the communication means in advance, and the communication means should be displayed as the candidate list in priority ranking sequence up to a specified rank. It would then be possible to display lower-ranked 25 communication means by user request.

Fifth Embodiment

Next, a notification system that correlates and administers communication means when a single user has a plurality of terminals shall be explained in detail.

5 Outline

Fig. 18 is an explanatory view illustrating principles of a notification system in this embodiment. With the exception of not having the downloading module 128, this notification system has functions like the notification system of the third embodiment. That is, this notification system has communication administration module 121, designation module 123, acquisition module 124, display module 126, selection module 127, candidate administration module 131, and candidate DB 132.

Communication means usable at the user terminal are reported from the communication administration module 121 to the candidate administration module 131, and stored in the candidate DB 132. When the user specifies a destination user, the list of communication means usable by both the originating and destination user (the candidate list) is sent from the candidate administration module 131 to the acquisition module 124, and displayed at the user terminal by the display module 126. If the destination user has a plurality of terminals, the candidate list is displayed with

the communication means grouped by communication means category.

Employing this notification system enables the destination user terminal to be selected according to the 5 destination user's location or status. The source user does not engage in futile communication, and the destination user can receive a communication request at the information terminal that best fits his circumstances.

Configuration

10 Fig. 19 is a functional block diagram showing the structure of notification system 111 in accordance with the fifth embodiment. This notification system consists of the user terminal 120 and server 130 connected by a network such as the Internet. Furthermore, the drawing shows only one 15 user terminal, but a plurality of user terminals is connected to the server.

(1) User Terminal

The user terminal has a communication administration module 121, designation module 123, acquisition module 124, 20 display module 126, and selection module 127. The communication administration module 121 reports communication means that the user terminal has to the server. In this example the communication administration module 121 receives notification of the communication means 25 selected by the source user from the server, and starts that

communication means. In addition, the communication administration module 121 has the function of reporting communication means status to the server. The communication administration module 121 preferably also has supplementary functions in addition to the communication means reporting function and starting function. These supplementary functions shall be described later.

The designation module 123 receives the destination user designation from the user and reports it to the server.

10 The acquisition module 124 acquires the list of communication means usable by both the source user and destination user--that is, the candidate list--from the candidate administration module 131. The display module 126 displays the candidate list on the user terminal. The 15 selection module 127 reports the communication means selected from the candidate list to the candidate administration module 131.

(2) Server

The server has candidate administration module 131 and candidate DB 132 and group DB 134. Based on reports from the communication administration module 121, the candidate administration module 131 stores user terminals and communication means usable at those terminals in the candidate DB 132. The candidate administration module 131 25 has grouping module 301. Using this, it refers to candidate

DB 132 and groups the communication means at each terminal belonging to a single user by communication means category, and stores the results in group DB 134.

The candidate administration module 131 also obtains 5 communication means usable by the designated destination user and communication means usable by the source user from the group DB 134 and creates the candidate list, and reports it to the source user. Further, the candidate administration module 131 preferably has other supplementary 10 functions. Supplementary functions of the candidate administration module 131 shall be described later.

Fig. 20 is a summary drawing explaining the data stored in the candidate DB 132. The candidate DB 132 stores user name, communication means, "usable?," update time, 15 communication status, and message. "User name" preferably is information that can specify a user; user ID may also be used. "Communication means" records the type of communication means and the terminal name. For example, "IM @ Office" indicates instant message in a terminal at the 20 office.

"Usable?" records information indicating whether or not a communication means at the user terminal is usable. "Update time" records the latest update time for this entry. "Communication status" records the status of the 25 communication means: "active," "standby," "communication

requested." "Message" records a message the user has set for the communication means. In Fig. 20 the message "I'm here" has been set for the communication means "IM @ Office."

5 Fig. 21 is a summary drawing explaining the data stored in the group DB 134. Among the communication means stored in the candidate DB 132, those communication means that are in "usable" status are grouped by predetermined criteria and recorded in the group DB 134. In this example communication 10 means functions are utilized by the grouped criteria. User name, communication type, link, priority ranking, and preference information are stored in the group DB 134.

As with user name in the foregoing candidate DB 132, "user name" is information that specifies the user.

15 "Communication type" records the function of the communication means. In Fig. 21 the communication means functions are shown as messaging, NetMeeting, FileTransfer, and telephone. "Link" records a combination of user terminal and communication means at that terminal, or 20 communication means. For example, in Fig. 21 the communication means that can use the messaging function for user A are "IM @ office/lab" or "e-mail."

"Priority ranking" records the priority ranking assigned to communication means having the same 25 communication function. Priority ranking is information

that is not always necessary in the group DB 134. Priority ranking may be assigned by the user, as will be described later. It may also be assigned by the server according to user status when the candidate DB 132 records the user 5 status (equivalent to the list DB) as in the first embodiment.

"Preference information" records information specifying the user and the communication means most recommended by that user. In Fig. 21 user A recommends that user "nkawa" 10 use IM @ office/lab" and that user "kohda" use "e-mail" for the messaging function. The communication means recommended by each user is also prioritized by the "priority ranking" setting.

(3) Communication Administration Module Supplementary 15 Functions

As noted earlier, the communication administration module 121 preferably has supplementary functions. In this example the communication administration module 121 has a confirmation module 201, editing module 202, storage module 203, status reporting module 204, contents sending module 205, contents DB 206, history acquisition module 207, and terminal communications module 208 for implementing supplementary functions.

Before communication begins, the confirmation module 25 201 obtains the source user's approval and then

communication occurs. When a communication function is selected, the confirmation module **201** reports to the user via the server that the communication function is being used. In addition, the confirmation module **201** receives 5 approval of the communication and communication occurs with the responding user terminal.

The editing module **202** receives user editing of the previously described group DB **134** or the message for a communication means and sends it to the server. A user can 10 use the editing module **202** to group communication means at the local terminal or add messages to communication means. The messages set for communication means are stored in the storage module **203** as a message list. In addition, the editing module **202** preferably is able to receive user 15 changes in whether or not an operable communication means at the other user's terminal can be used, and send these to the server.

The storage module **203** stores the message list. Fig. 22 is a conceptual diagram explaining the message list. 20 Communication means and messages set by the user are associated and stored in the message list. In addition to the message list, the storage module **203** stores specific information such as the name of the user terminal. A terminal name is "office" or "lab," for example, and is

information for distinguishing among user terminals. The user uses the editing module 202 to set a terminal name.

The status reporting module 204 reports communication status of the communication means at the user terminal to 5 the server. The "communication status" of the candidate list is updated according to this report. The status reporting module 204 also acquires the communication status at the user's other terminals and reports this to the server.

10 The contents sending module 205 stores specific information, including communication contents, in the content DB 206 when communication is executed by a communication means that the user terminal has. Fig. 23 is an explanatory diagram summarizing the information stored in 15 the content DB 206. The content DB 206 stores communication means, communication contents, start time, end time, and messaging party. "Communication means" records both the communication means and terminal name. "Communication contents" records the data sent and received. For example, 20 if the communication means is instant message (IM), the contents of the message are recorded in the communication contents. "Start time" and "end time" record the communication start and end time respectively. "Messaging party" records the source user.

The contents sending module **205** also sends specific information, including communication contents, to other terminals of the same user via the server. This makes it possible for the user to acquire communication contents that 5 occurred at his terminal **1a** at another of his terminals, **2a**.

The terminal communications module **208** detects other user terminals near the local terminal by wireless means. For example, a detection data string is sent by wireless means, and a data string in response to this is received, 10 thus detecting the other terminal.

The history acquisition module **207** acquires the user's communication history from the server's history DB **305**, to be described later, and reports this to the user.

The terminal communications module **208** establishes a data link between the local terminal and the other terminal when another terminal is detected. Then data is transferred, with the terminal used by the user as the master side and the other terminal as the slave side. The master terminal communications module **208** asks the slave 15 terminal communications module **208** to report the terminal name and usable communication means. In addition, the master terminal communications module **208** uses the response to this request and reports to the server, with the slave terminal's communication means forming a module of the 20 master's communication means. All data to be sent and 25

received between the slave terminal and the server is relayed using the master terminal communications module 208. If the terminal communications module 208 function is used, when a single user uses a plurality of terminals the usable 5 communication means at the currently used terminal and at other terminals can be included in the candidate list.

(4) Server Supplementary Functions

As described previously, the server preferably has supplementary functions. In this example the server has a 10 confirmation sending module 302, status acquisition module 303, log module 304, and history DB 305 for executing supplementary functions.

The confirmation sending module 302 is provided in the server to correspond to the confirmation module 201 in the 15 communication administration module 121. The confirmation sending module 302 sends a receipt confirmation for all usable communication means selected as a communication function by the source user. The confirmation sending module 302 also sends the source user terminal an answer 20 with regard to receipt confirmation.

The status acquisition module 303 is provided in the server to correspond to the status-reporting module 204 in the communication administration module 121. The status acquisition module 303 receives communication status from 25 the user terminal and updates the candidate DB 132's

"communication status." Also, the status acquisition module 303 reports changes in the status of communication means at other user terminals to the same user's terminal.

The log module 304 stores the names of communication means started and finished at each user terminal in the history DB 305 in accordance with communication status from the user terminal. The history DB 305 may also store communication contents too. In response to a request from the user terminal, the log module 304 reads the user's communication history from the history DB 305 and sends it to the requesting user terminal.

Process Flow

Next, the processing flow in a notification system that has the previously described functions shall be explained in detail.

(1) Main Process

Fig. 24 is a diagram explaining the main processing flow in the notification system of this embodiment. In this process, the source user selects a communication function--that is, a group of communication means--and requests communication.

First, at startup, the notification device reports communication means the local terminal has to the server (#101, #102). Also, if a communication means becomes usable

or unusable, the notification device reports the new status to the server (#101, #102).

The server updates the candidate DB **132** based on the report from the user terminal (#103, #104). In addition, 5 the server groups communication means and updates group DB **134** based on the new contents of the candidate DB **132** (#105, #106). For example, in the candidate DB **132** shown in Fig. 21 suppose "IM @ Office" changes from "usable" to "unusable." In this case, the messaging "IM @ Office" is 10 deleted from the group DB **134** shown in Fig. 22.

When any user is specified as the destination user, the server reads the group DB **134** for the destination and source users, creates a candidate list, and sends it to the source user terminal (#107, #108, #109). If a priority ranking or 15 preference is set in the group DB **134**, the communication means described in the candidate list are determined based on this information. It is also possible to make a communication means' priority higher according to the latest update time in the candidate DB.

20 For example, the server lists only the communication means with the highest priority for the source user within the same group on the candidate list. Communication means usable by both users are grouped by each communication function and displayed at the source user terminal (#110,

#111). Examples of displayed candidate lists are the screen samples shown in the previously described Fig. 7 and Fig. 8.

When the source user selects any of the communication means from the displayed candidate list, the communication means is started at the user terminal (#112, #113).

Meanwhile, the selected communication means is reported via the server to the destination user terminal (#114, #115).

The destination user terminal starts the communication means in accordance with the communication means report (#116, #117).

In this process, assigning correspondences to the users administrates user communication means existing diversified among a plurality of terminals. Therefore the user can easily know what communication means are present at the other user's plurality of terminals, and smooth communication is possible.

(2) Confirmation Process

Fig. 25 is a diagram explaining the confirmation processing flow performed by the notification system. In this processing, communication begins after confirming the destination user's intent.

The source user specifies a destination user and selects a communication means from the candidate list (#121-#125). This processing is the same as #107-#112 in the foregoing main process. The server sends a reception

confirmation to all destination user terminals that can use the selected communication means (#126, #127).

The source user and the communication means are reported to the destination user terminal that received this 5 (#128, #129). For example, a message such as "User A wants to telephone you. Do you want to communicate?" is displayed at the terminal. The destination user terminal waits for a designated time for a user response to this message, and reports the response to the server (#130, #133). If there 10 is no response within the designated time, nothing happens (#131, #132).

Upon receiving a response, the server reports the response contents to the source user terminal (#134). Fig. 25 diagrams the routine when the response is "communicate." 15 In this case, the server reports the name of the terminal that responded to the source user terminal (#134, #135). The source user terminal starts communication with the reported terminal using the selected communication means (#136, #137).

20 Furthermore, if the response is "don't communicate," the source user terminal reports the response contents to the user.

(3) Communication Status Broadcast Process

Fig. 26 is an explanatory diagram showing the flow of 25 communication status broadcast processing performed by the

notification system. In this process, the communication status of user terminal a1 is broadcast to the user's other terminals: a2, a3 . . .

User A has a plurality of terminals: a1, a2, a3 . . .

5 When some sort of change in communication status occurs at a certain terminal a1, this change is reported to the server (#141, #142). For example, terminal a1 has a telephone call, or an instant message is received.

10 Based on this report, the server reports the terminal name, communication means, and new communication status to user A's other terminals: a2, a3... (#143, #144). Based on this report, the other terminals a2, a3... report the change in communication status at terminal a1 (#145, #146). For example, they display a message such as "Terminal a1 has 15 received a telephone call."

(4) Communication Content Acquisition Process

Fig. 27 is a diagram illustrating a communication content acquisition routine performed by the notification system. In this process user A acquires the contents of 20 communication conducted at his own terminal a2 at another of his terminals a1 via the server.

First, user A designates one of his plurality of terminals (a2), and requests the contents of communications conducted at that terminal (#151). The server relays the 25 request to the specified terminal a2 (#152).

The designated terminal a2 performs the designated authorization processing with terminal a1, and confirms whether or not the requestor has the right to acquire the communication contents (#153, #154). If authorized,
5 terminal a2 requests search conditions (#155). For example, it requests conditions such as a range of communication start times, the messaging party, or communication means, for extracting data from the contents DB 206. On the other hand, if not authorized, the authorization result is
10 reported to terminal a1 via the server (#156).

Terminal a1 receives input of search conditions from the user and sends them to terminal a2 via the server (#158, #159, #160).

Terminal a2 searches the contents DB 206 based on the designated search conditions, extracts data, and sends it to terminal a1 (#161, #162, #163). For example, if a range of communication start times is designated, the contents of communication that began during that range are read and sent to the terminal a1. In addition to communication contents, 20 the extracted data can be information stored in the contents DB 206. In this way user A can acquire at different terminal a1 the content of communications conducted at terminal a2, or the messaging party.

(5) Communication Log Acquisition Process

Fig. 28 is an explanatory diagram showing communication log acquisition process performed by the notification system. In this process user A can acquire the history of communications at his plurality of terminals a1, a2, a3... 5 at any of his terminals.

When user A requests the communication log at any terminal a1 (#171), the server decides whether or not the user has the right to acquire the communication history using a predetermined authorization process (#172, #173).

10 If the user is authorized, the server reads the communication log at all terminals of the relevant user from the history DB 305 and sends it to the requesting terminal a1 (#174, #175). The communication log at all of user A's terminals is displayed at terminal a1 (#176). If not 15 authorized, the server sends a predetermined message to the requesting terminal a1, for example, and terminal a1 reports to the user that it is not authorized (#177).

Sixth Embodiment

(A) In the foregoing fifth embodiment a single user's 20 communication means were grouped by communication means function, but they may also be grouped by other criteria.

Other Embodiments

(A) The foregoing first through sixth embodiments were 25 individually explained, but it is possible to appropriately combine and practice each embodiment.

(B) Recording media recording programs for executing the methods described in the foregoing first through sixth embodiments are included in the present invention. Examples of these recording media include computer-readable floppy 5 disks, hard disks, semiconductor memories, CD-ROMs, DVDs, magneto-optical disks (MO).

(C) A transmission medium transmitting a program for executing the previously described inventive methods is also included in the present invention. Examples of this 10 transmission medium include transmission media (optical fibers, wireless circuitry) in computer network systems (LANs, the Internet, wireless communication networks) for transmitting and providing program information as carrier waves.

15 (D) A server that provides a program for executing the previously described inventive methods using the foregoing transmission medium is also included in the present invention.

Utilizing the present invention notifies a user after 20 selecting a communications partner of communication means usable by both the other party and the user. This makes it possible to select a communication means taking into account not just the other party's circumstances but also the user's own circumstances, so convenience to the user who is trying 25 to initiate communication is increased. Further, not only

communication means already present at a user terminal, but communication means that are available through downloading can be selected. In addition, wherein user have communication means at a plurality of terminals, the 5 communication means at each terminal are administered by correlating to the users, and therefore the source user can communicate by communication means on his terminal that are most convenient for the destination user.

While only selected embodiments have been chosen to 10 illustrate the present invention, to those skilled in the art it will be apparent from this disclosure that various changes and modifications can be made herein without departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims. Furthermore, the foregoing description of 15 the embodiments according to the present invention is provided for illustration only, and not for the purpose of limiting the invention as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A communication-means notification method for use in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a network for

5 users to communicate with one another, the method:

(a) user-relationally storing communication means operable in users' information terminals;

(b) receiving a destination-user designation from a source user requesting communication;

10 (c) based on information stored in (a), generating a list describing communication means operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal; and

(d) reporting the list to the source user before

15 communication begins.

2. A communication-means notification system for use in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a network for users to communicate with one another, the system

20 comprising:

a first table user-relationally storing communication means operable in users' information terminals;

an administration means for receiving operable communication means settings from users and storing the

25 settings in said first table;

a designation means for receiving destination-user designations from source users requesting communication;

an acquisition means for acquiring from said first table communication means operable at both source users' 5 information terminals and destination users' information terminals;

a generation means for generating a list, based on information acquired by said acquisition means, describing communication means actually usable by both source users and 10 destination users; and

a notification means for reporting the generated list to source users before communication begins.

3. The communication-means notification system set forth in claim 2, further comprising:

15 a second table for storing relationally to users and predetermined user statuses communication means actually usable in the user statuses; and

a prioritizing means for receiving settings on the actually usable communication means in the predetermined 20 user statuses and storing the settings in said second table; wherein

said first table together stores user status in addition to communication means, and

said administration means receives settings on new 25 user status and writes actually usable communication

means in the new user status into said first table in accordance with said second table settings.

4. The communication-means notification system set forth in claim 2, further comprising:

5 a second table for storing relationally to users and user statuses communication means actually usable in predetermined user statuses, and priority levels for the communication means; and

10 a prioritizing means for receiving settings on the actually usable communication means in the predetermined user statuses, and the priority level settings for the actually usable communication means, and storing the settings in said second table; wherein

15 said first table together stores communication means priority level and user status in addition to communication means,

20 said administration means receives settings on new user status and writes actually usable communication means in the new user status, and communication means priority level, into said first table in accordance with said second table settings,

said acquisition means acquires from said first table communication means actually usable by both a source user's information terminal and a destination

user's information terminal and the priority level of
the actually usable communication means, and
said generation means generates said list based on
the priority level of the communication means actually
5 usable by both the source user and the destination
user.

5. The communication-means notification system set
forth in 4, wherein said generation means rearranges
communication means in accordance with source user priority
10 level.

6. The communication-means notification system set
forth in claim 4, wherein said generation means rearranges
communication means in accordance with destination user
priority level.

15 7. The communication-means notification system set
forth in claim 2, wherein said designation means receives
designations using identification information designating
operable communication means at destination users'
information terminals.

20 8. The communication-means notification system set
forth in claim 2, wherein
said designation means is enabled to receive a
destination-user's designation according to identification
information specifying operable communication means at
25 destination users' information terminals; and

if a communication means corresponding to the identification information is usable by both a destination user and a source user, said generation means describes that communication means at the head of the list.

5 9. The communication-means notification system set forth in claim 2, wherein said designation means is enabled to receive a destination user's designation according to identification information specifying operable communication means at destination users' information terminals, further
10 comprising

 a starting means for starting, if a communication means corresponding to the identification information is usable by both a destination user and a source user, communication according to that communication means.

15 10. The communication-means notification system set forth in claim 2, wherein said communication means is a game application wherein a plurality of users can participate on a network.

15 11. A computer-readable recording medium whereon is recorded a communication-means notification program for use in information terminals wherein communication means selectively employed by users for communicating with one another is installed, and for use in information terminals able to communicate with said information terminals; said
25 communication means notification program recorded on the

computer-readable recording medium for executing the following steps:

- A. preparing a first table user-relationally storing communication means operable in users' information terminals;
- B. receiving operable communication means settings from users and storing the settings in said first table;
- C. receiving destination-user designations from source users requesting communication;
- D. acquiring from said first table communication means operable at both source users' information terminals and destination users' information terminals;
- E. generating a list, based on information acquired by said acquisition means, describing communication means actually usable by both source users and destination users; and
- F. reporting the generated list to source users before communication begins.

12. A communication-means notification method for use

20 in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a network for users to communicate with one another, the method:

- (a) user-relationally storing communication means operable in users' information terminals;

5

- (b) receiving a destination-user designation from a source user requesting communication;
- (c) based on information stored in (a), generating a first list describing communication means operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal;
- 10
- (d) generating a second list describing communication means present at either the destination or source user's information terminal and not at the other, and downloadable to the terminal not having the communication means present and executable on said terminal; and
- 15
- (e) reporting a third list composite of the first list and the second list to the source user before communication begins.

13. The communication-means notification method set forth in claim 12, wherein said second list includes a description of communication means not present on either the destination nor source user's information terminal, and
20 downloadable to both terminals and executable on both terminals.

14. The communication-means notification method set forth in claim 12, wherein:

25 download conditions for downloading communication means to users' information terminals and execution conditions for

executing communication means on users' information terminals are stored in advance for each downloadable communication means; and

the second list is generated based on terminal

5 information and download conditions and execution conditions for users' information terminals.

15. The communication-means notification method set forth in claim 12, wherein:

selection of any of the communication means on the
10 third list is received from the source user and the selected communication means is reported to the destination user's information terminal; and

if the destination user's information terminal does not have the selected communication means, the destination
15 user's information terminal acquires the selected communication means by downloading.

16. A computer-readable recording medium whereon is recorded a program for executing the communication-means notification method set forth in the foregoing claims 12-15.

20 17. A communication-means notification system for use in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a network for users to communicate with one another, the system comprising:

a first table user-relationally storing communication means operable in users' information terminals;

a designation means for receiving destination-user designations from source users requesting communication;

5 a first generating means for generating a list, based on information stored in said first table, describing communication means operable on both destination users' information terminals and source users' information terminals;

10 a second generating means for generating a second list describing communication means present at either a destination or a source user's information terminal and not at the other, and downloadable to the terminal not having the communication means present and executable on said 15 terminal; and

a notification means for reporting a third list composite of the first list and the second list to the source user before communication begins.

18. A communication means supply device for use in the 20 communication-means notification system set forth in 17, including:

a creation means for creating a downloadable-executable list of communication means downloadable to information terminals and executable on the information terminals for 25 destination users and source users respectively; and

a supply means for supplying communication means included in the downloadable-executable list to user information terminals.

19. A communication-means notification method for use
5 in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a network for users to communicate with one another, the method:

- (a) user-relationally storing communication means operable on users' single or plural information terminals and terminal identification information for identifying users' information terminals;
- (b) receiving a destination-user designation from a source user requesting communication;
- (c) based on information stored in (a), generating a list describing communication means operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal; and
- (d) wherein a plurality of the same communication means is included in said list, adding to said list further information for distinguishing the information terminals, and reporting said list to the source user before communication begins.

20. The communication-means notification method set
25 forth in 19, wherein:

a user-set messages with respect to communication means on information terminals are stored together with the communication means and information terminals; and a destination-user-set message is further included in 5 the list reported to the source user.

21. The communication-means notification method set forth in 19, wherein:

the communication means operable at the same user's single information terminal or plurality of information 10 terminals are grouped by predetermined criteria;

said list is generated based on the grouped communication means; and

the communication means described in said list are grouped by the predetermined criteria, and reported to the 15 source user before communication begins.

22. The communication-means notification method set forth in 21, wherein by-group priority rankings are established for the communication means, and said list is created based on the priority rankings.

20 23. The communication-means notification method set forth in 22, wherein said priority rankings are established based on sequence made by usability within the groups.

24. The communication-means notification method set forth in 22, wherein:

a recommended communication means is established for each source user in each communication means group; and said list is generated by modifying the communication means priority rankings for each source.

5 25. The communication-means notification method set forth in 21, wherein selection of any group based on said list is received from the source user, and an attempt is made to communicate with the destination user's communication means included in the selected group.

10 26. The communication-means notification method set forth in 21, wherein:

selection of any group based on said list is received from the source user;

inquiry is made to the destination user's communication means included in the selected group as to whether it is receiving or not; and

communication begins with the communication means first to respond in the destination user's information terminal.

27. A computer-readable recording medium whereon is recorded a program for executing the communication-means notification methods set forth in any of the foregoing claims 19-26.

28. A communication-means notification system for use in a communications system selectively employing communication means installed in information terminals on a

network for users to communicate with one another, the system comprising:

- a first table for user-relationally storing communication means operable on users' single or plural
- 5 information terminals and terminal identification information for identifying users' information terminals;
- designation means for receiving a destination-user designation from a source user requesting communication;
- generating means for generating a list based on
- 10 information stored in said first table, describing communication means operable at both the destination user's information terminal and the source user's information terminal; and
- notification means for adding to said list, wherein a
- 15 plurality of the same communication means is included in said list, further information for distinguishing the information terminals, and for reporting said list to the source user before communication begins.

ABSTRACT

Method and system for reporting to a source user before communication begins communication means usable by both the source and a destination user. Operable communication means 5 at each user's information terminal are stored in a list DB 2 in advance for each user. A selection device 1 receives a destination user designation from the source user who is requesting communication, and acquires the usable communication means of the destination user and the source 10 user respectively from the list DB 2. There are also cases in which the selection device 1 acquires communication means usable by the source user from the selection device 1 or a user terminal 4. Next, the selection device 1 creates a candidate list describing communication means which both 15 parties can use, and sends it from a WWW server, for example, to the source user terminal. Before communication begins, the candidate list is displayed at the source user terminal by a WWW browser, for example.

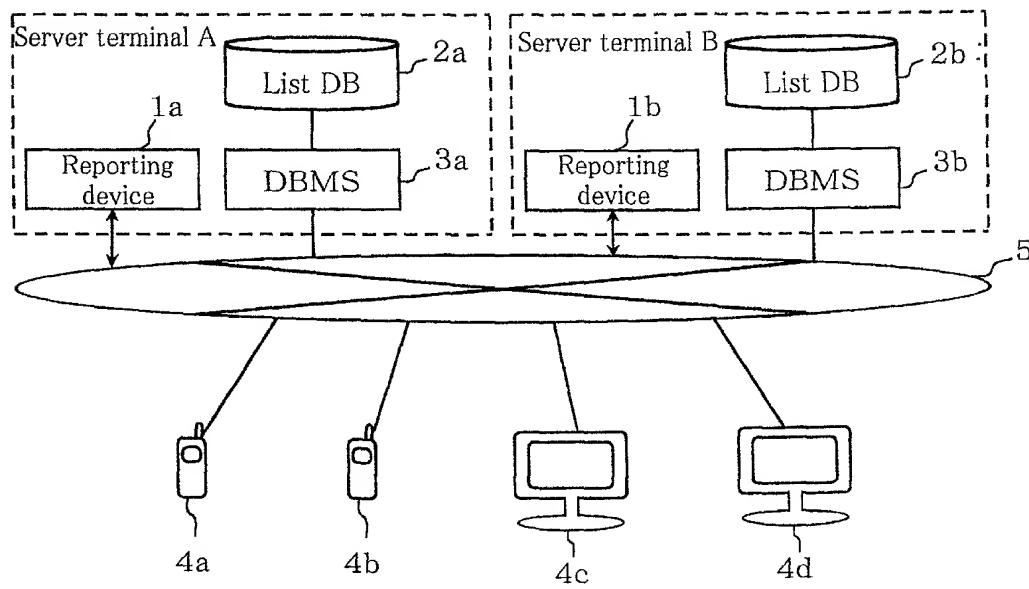


Fig. 1

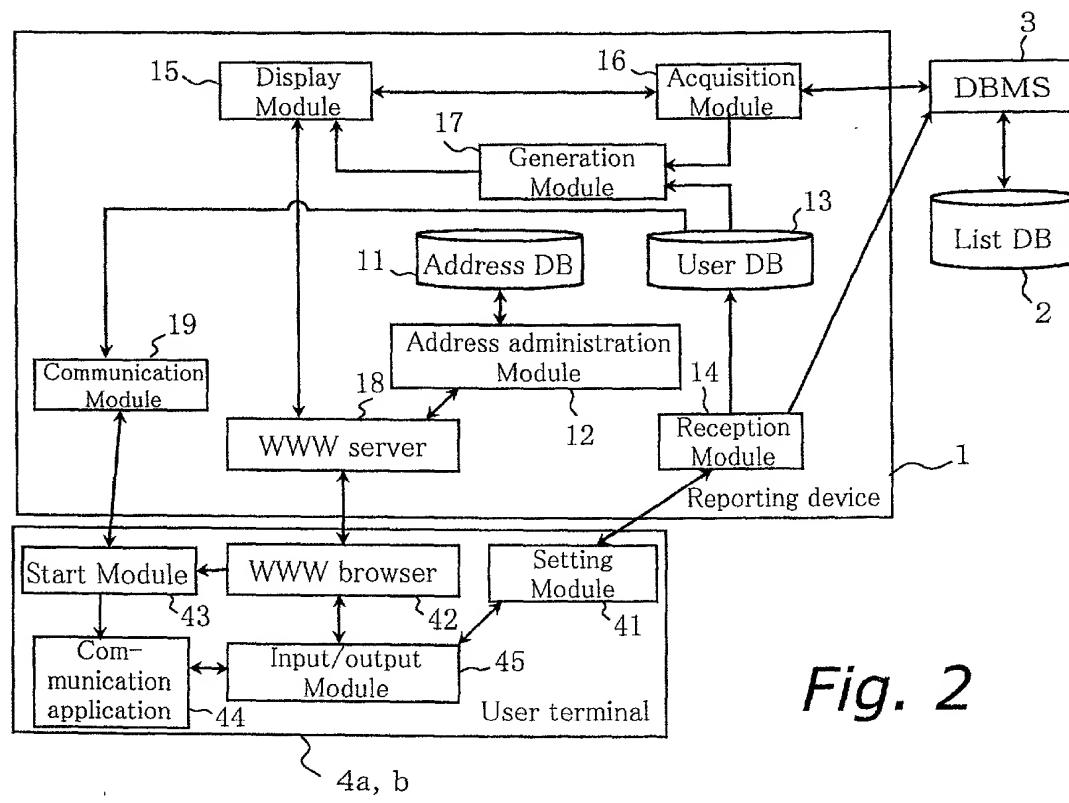


Fig. 2

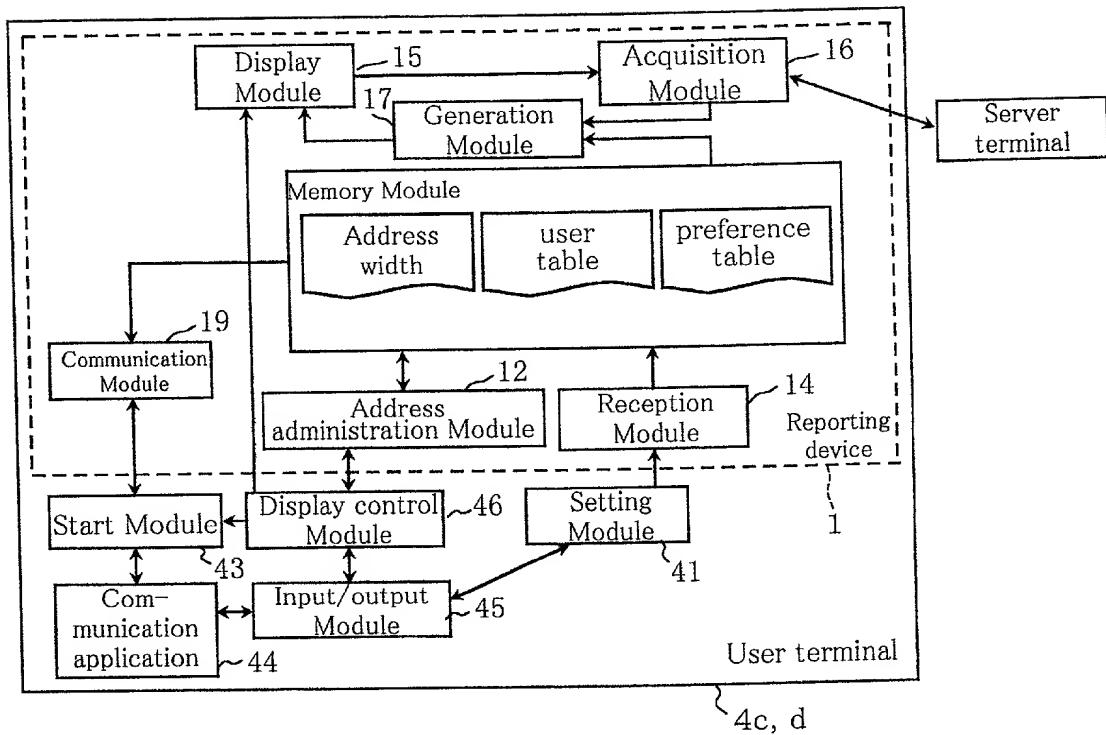


Fig. 3

User ID	User Name	User Status	Communication Means	Useable	Attribute Information	Comm. Parameters
0001	Taro Suzuki	online	Email Chat Instant message Telephone Videoconference	Yes Yes Yes Yes No	for Office at Office at Office for Office at Office	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
0002	Hanako Yamada	busy	Email Chat Instant message Telephone :	Yes No Yes Yes :		* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * :
		:				

Fig. 4

User ID	User Name	Communication Means	User Status	Priority
0001	Taro Suzuki	Mail	Online	2
			Other	1
		Chat	Busy	3
			Other	2
		Instant message	Online	1
			Other	3
		Telephone	Away	3
			Office	1
			Other	2
		Videoconference	All	3
0002 ...	Hanako Yamada ...	Mail ...	Online ...	1 ...

Fig. 5

User ID	User Name	User Status	Communication Means	Useable	Priority	Attribute Information
0001	Taro Suzuki	Online	Email	Yes	2	for Office
			Chat	Yes	2	at Office
			Instant message	Yes	1	at Office
			Telephone	Yes	2	for Office
			Videoconference	No	3	at Office
0002	Hanako Yamada	Busy	Email Chat Instant message Telephone	Yes No Yes Yes	1 3 2 2	

Fig. 6

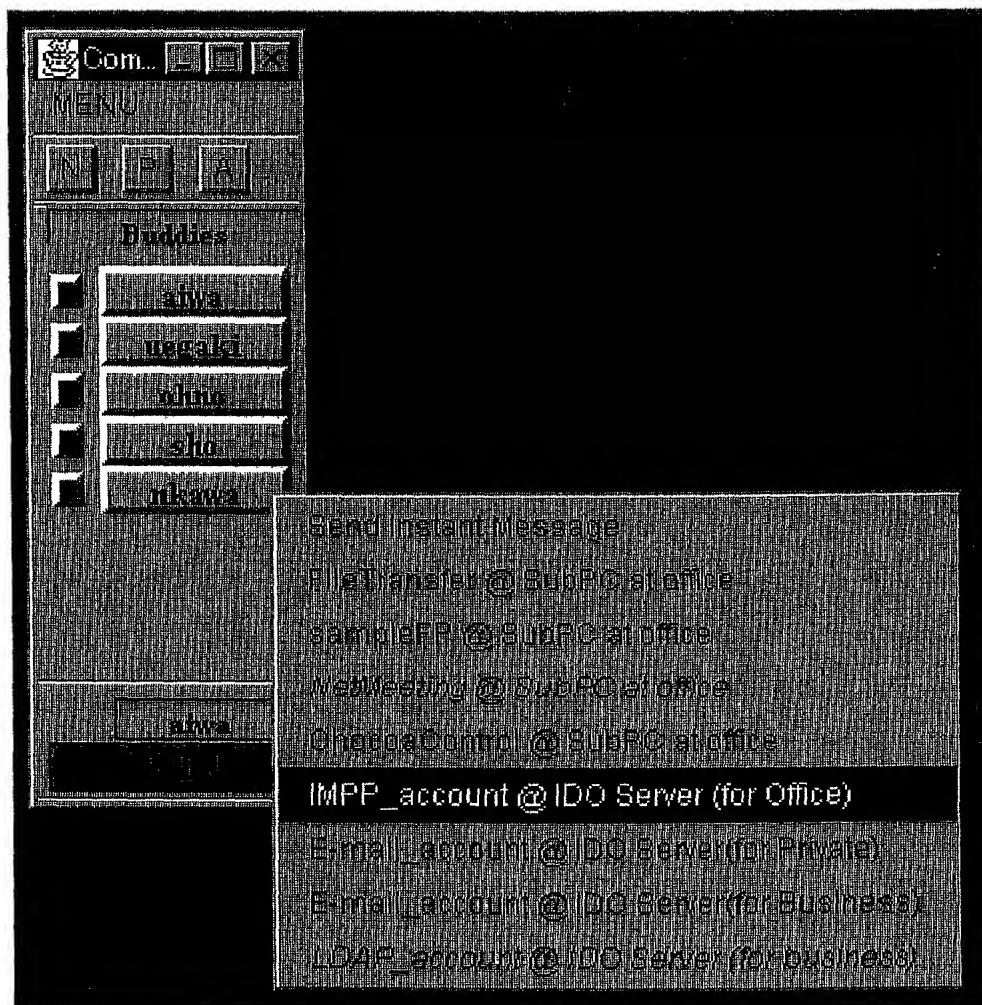


Fig. 7

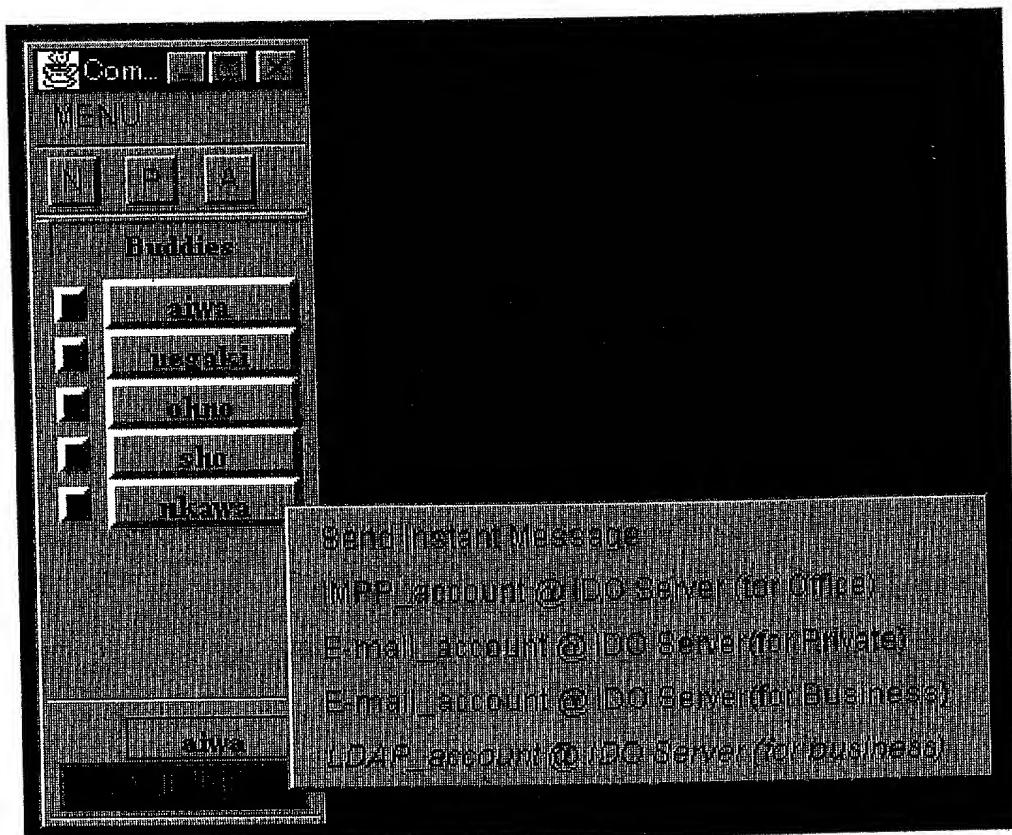


Fig. 8

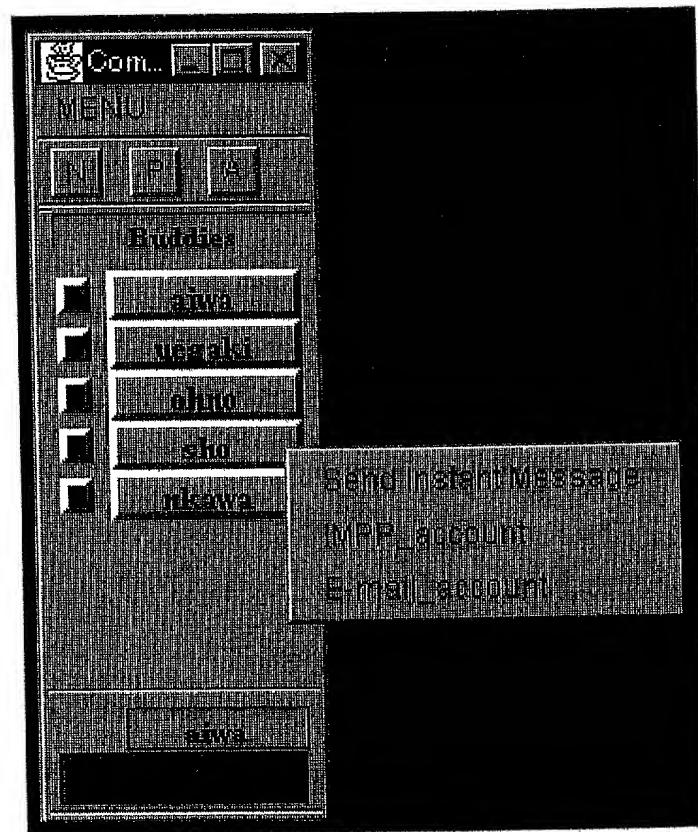


Fig. 9

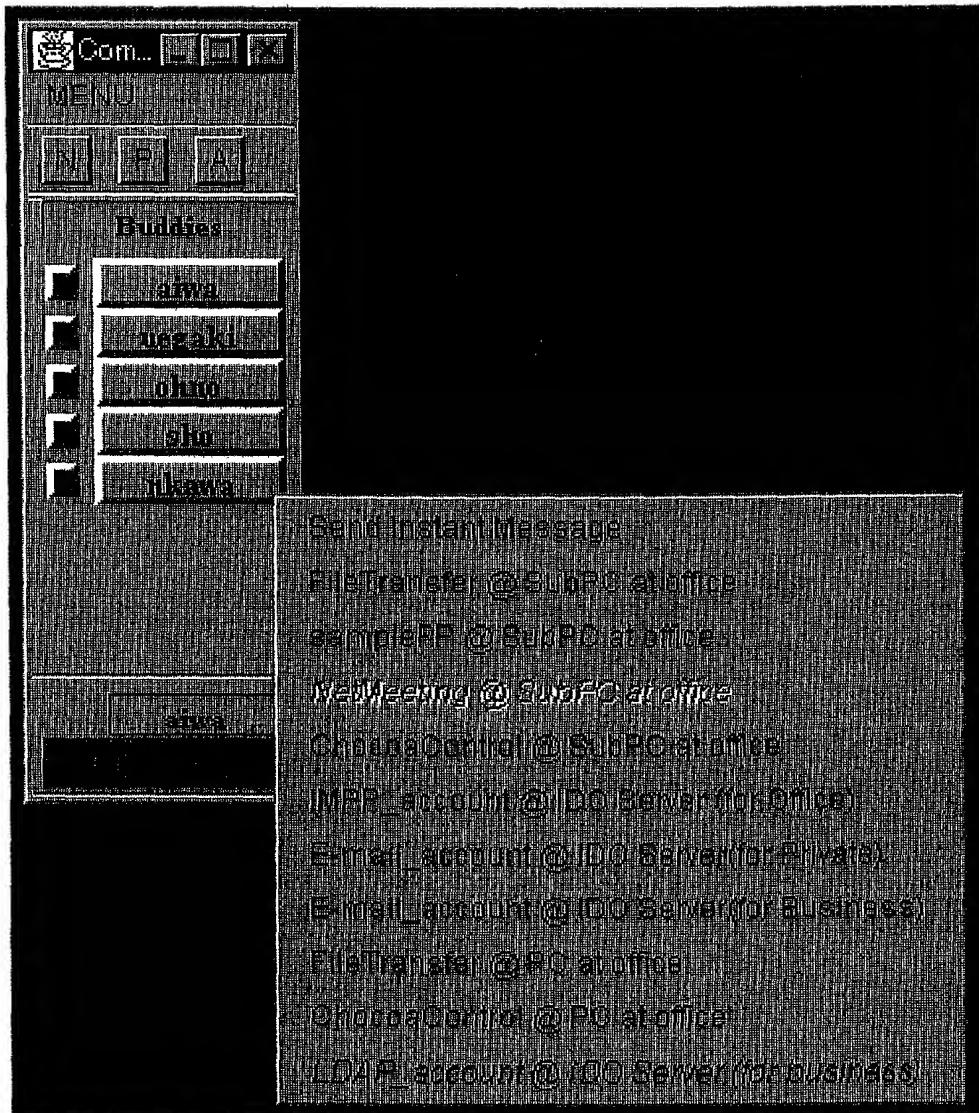


Fig. 10

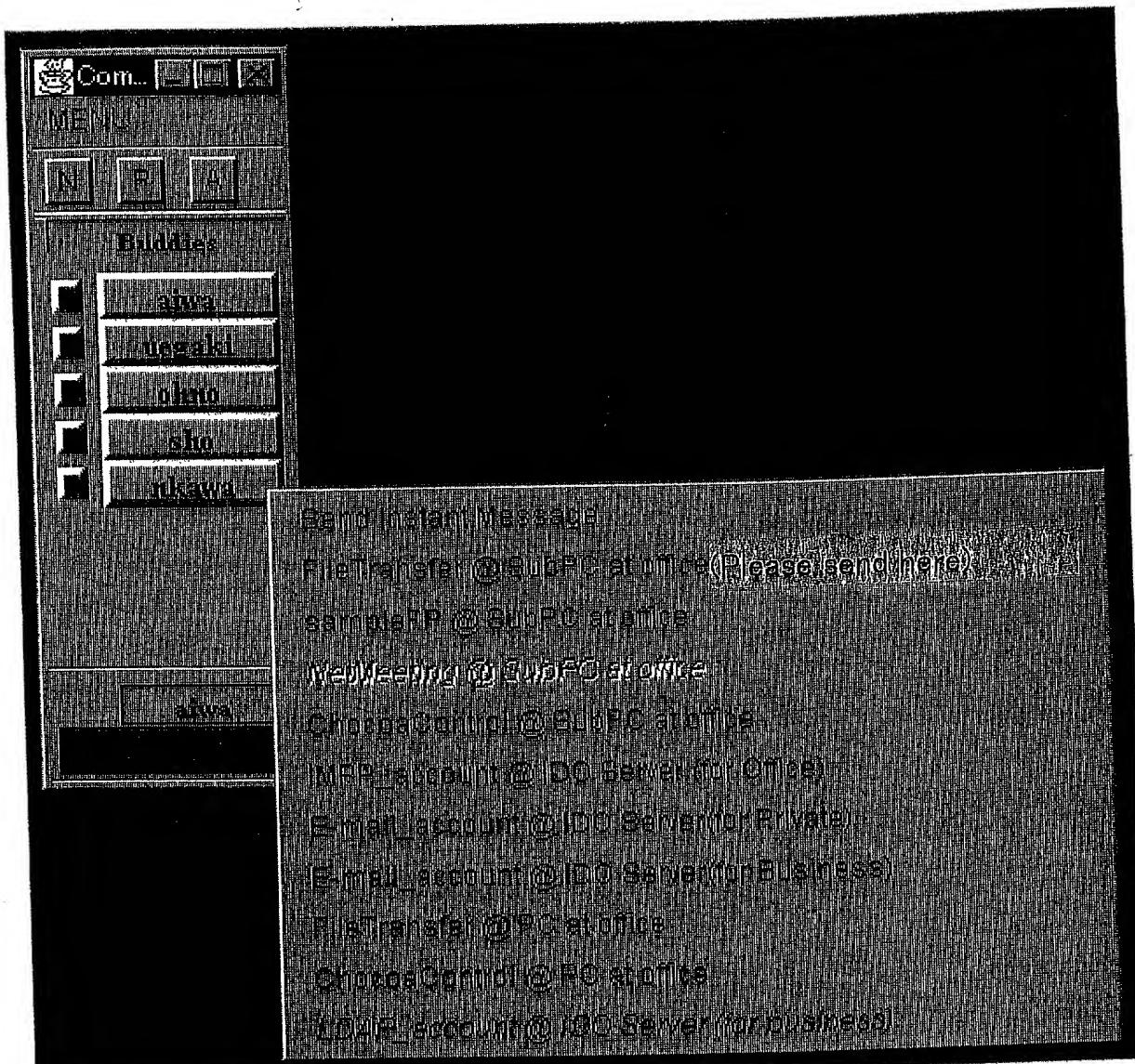


Fig. 11

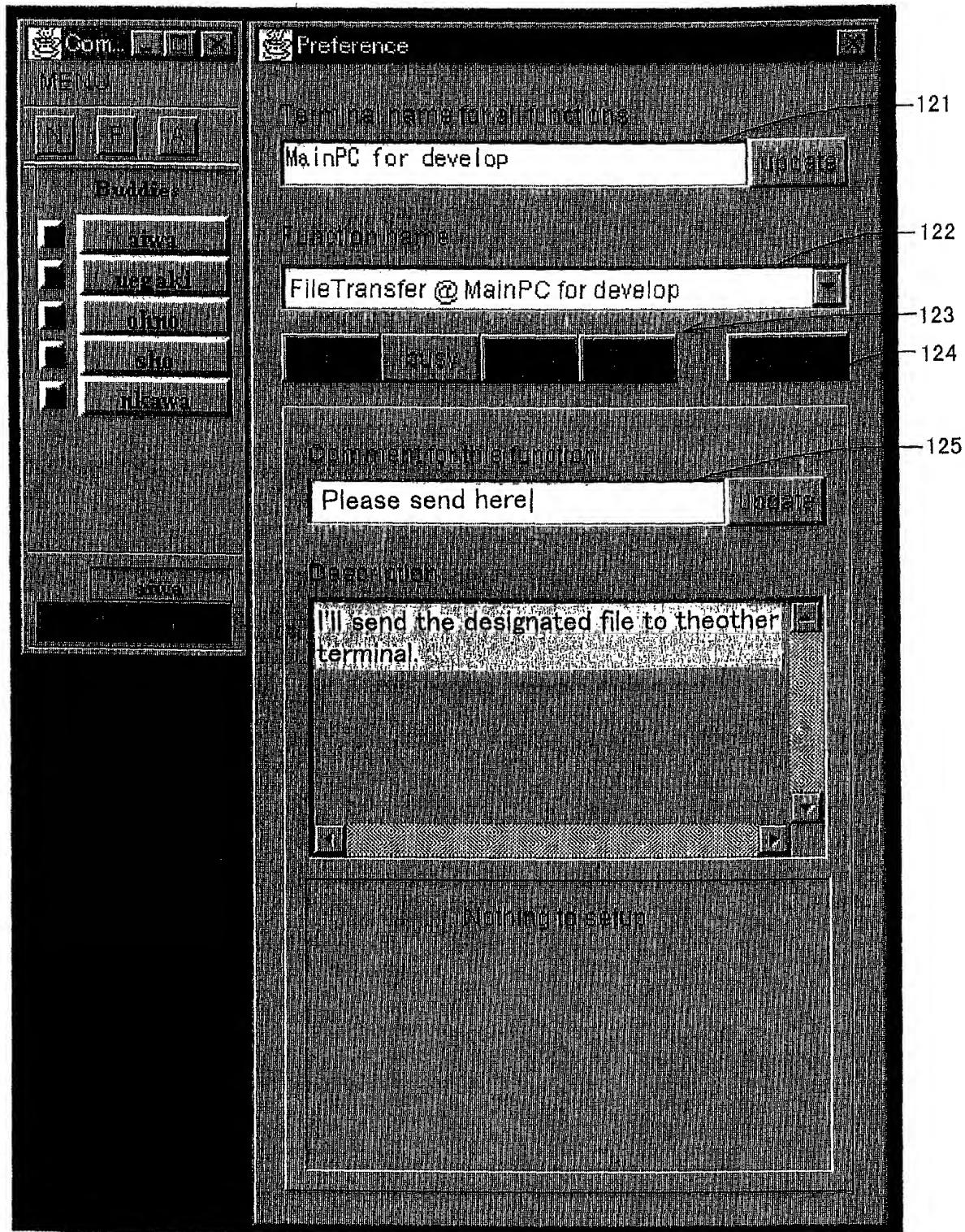


Fig. 12

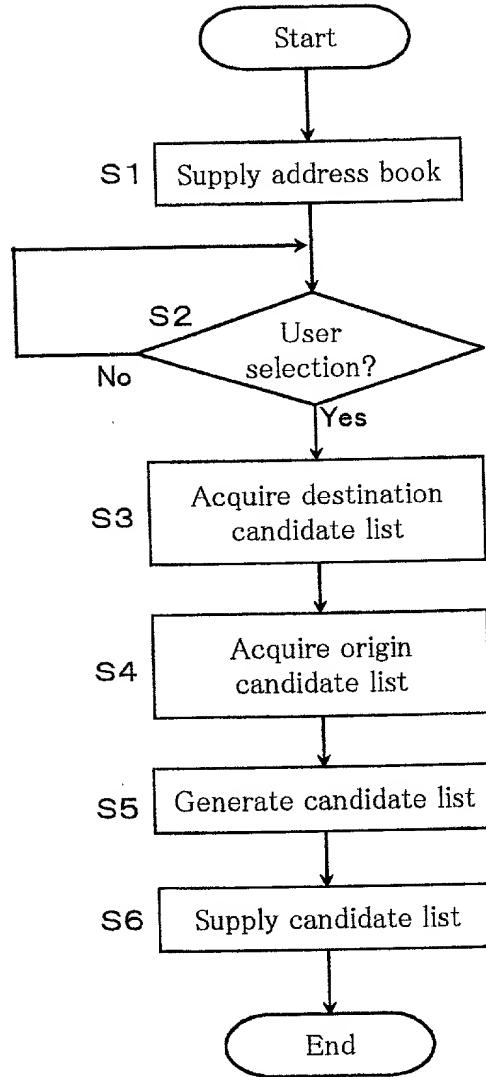


Fig. 13

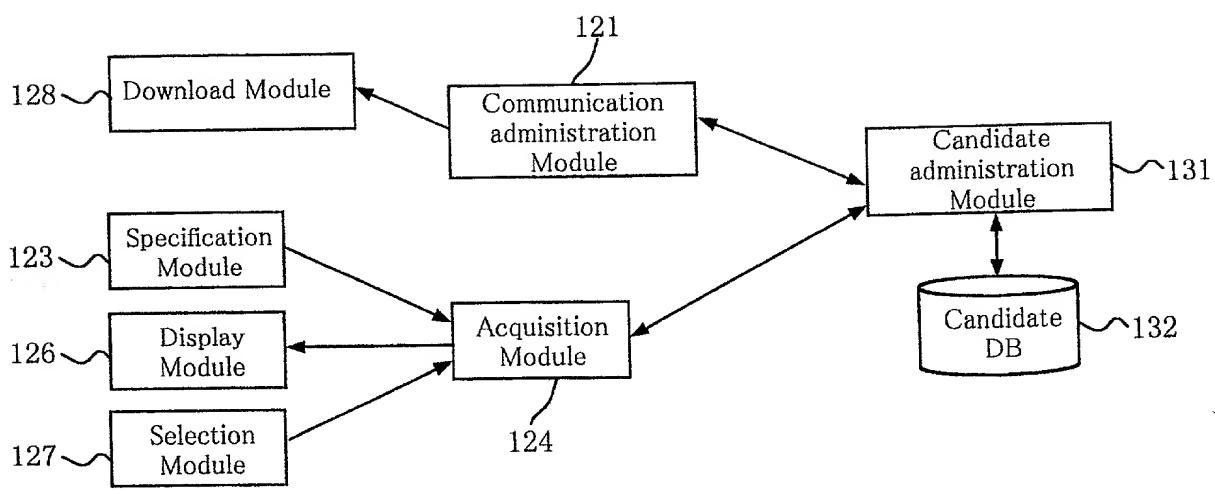
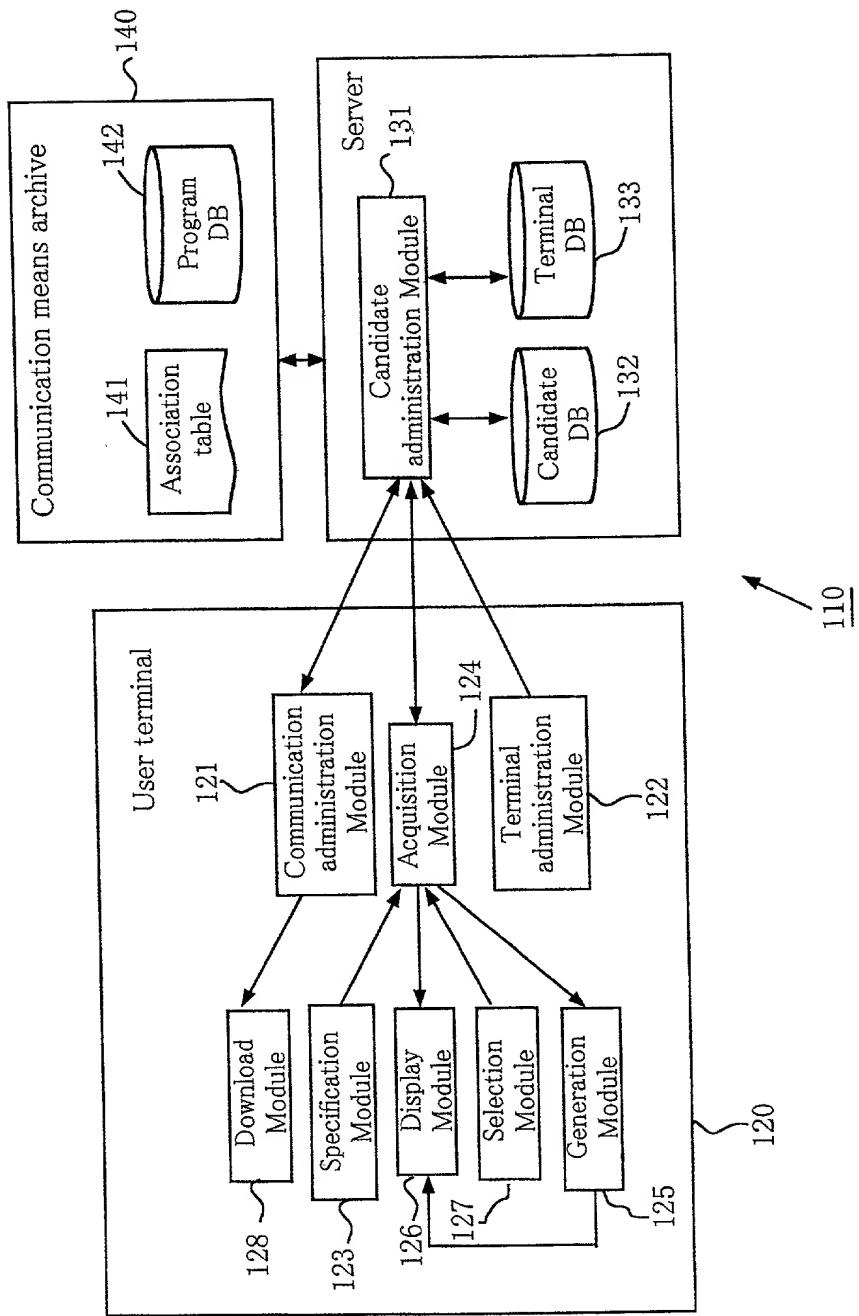


Fig. 14

Fig. 15



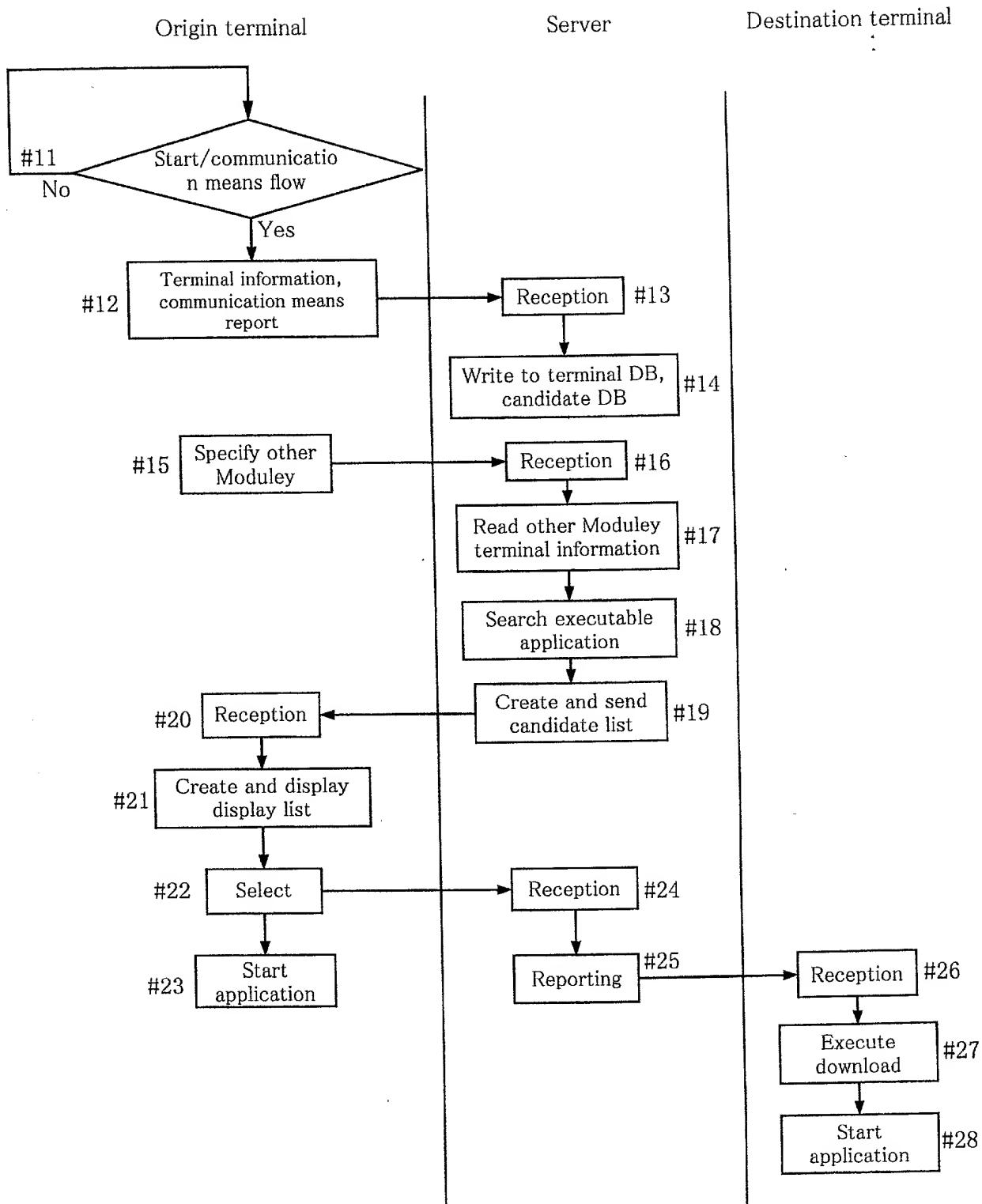


Fig. 16

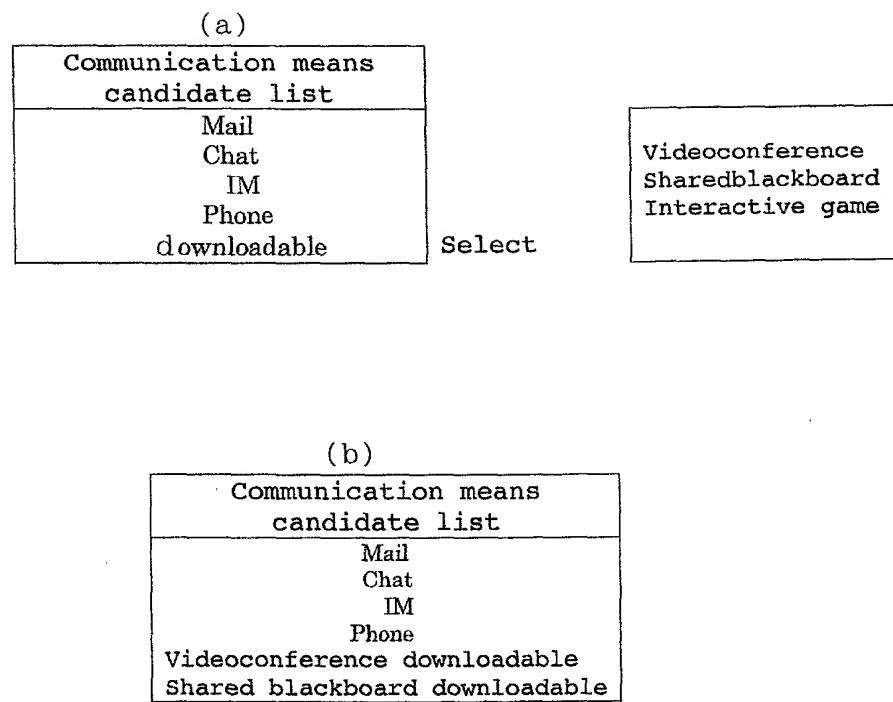


Fig. 17

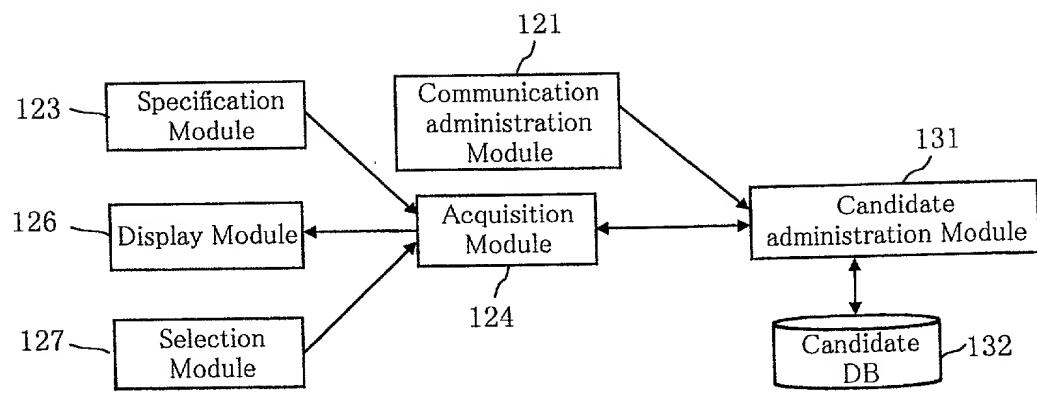
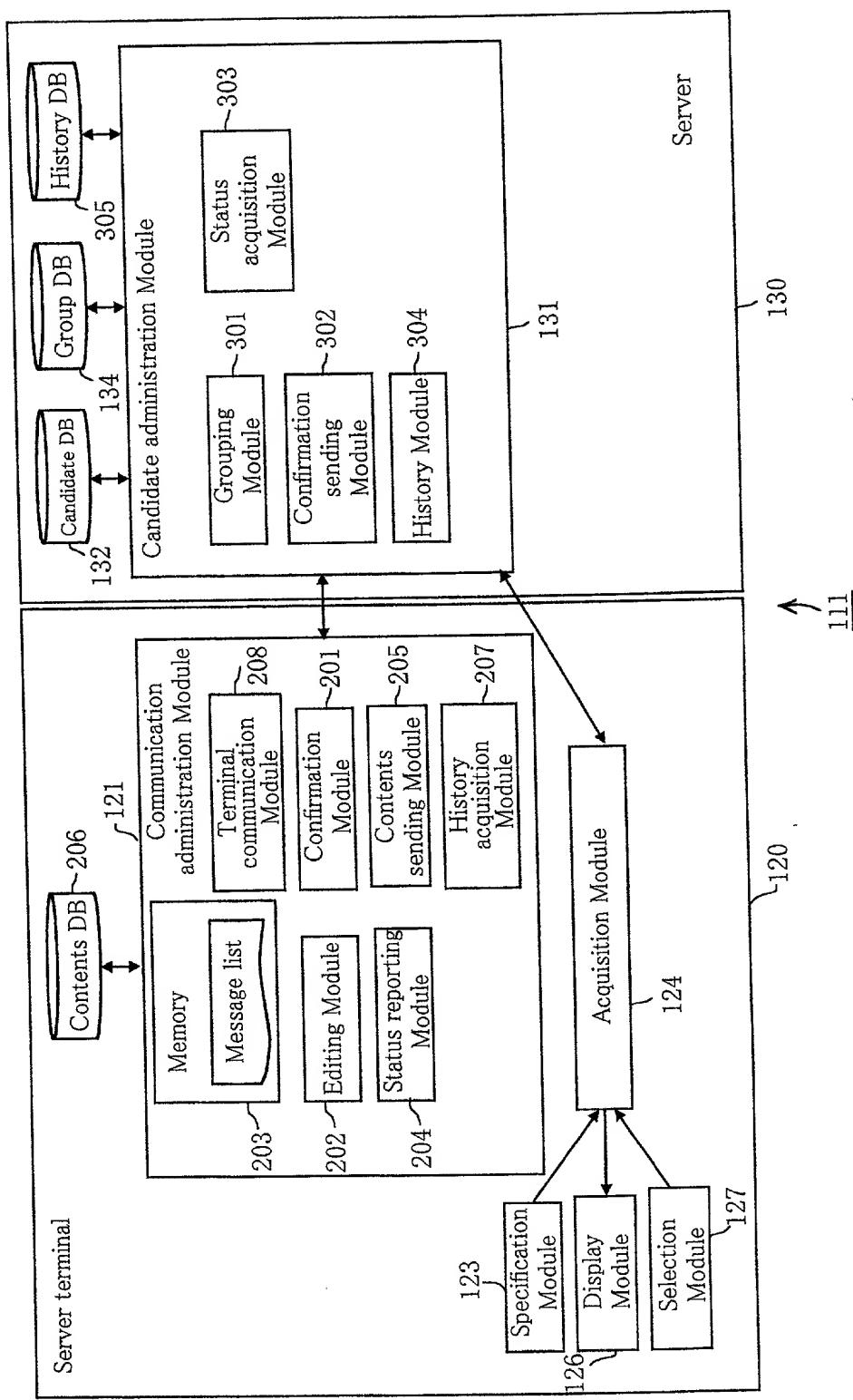


Fig. 18

Fig. 19



Candidate DB

User Name	Comm. Means Name	Can or Can't Use	Comm. Status	Update Time	Message
User A	IM @ Office	Can't	Standby	14:43:50	I'm here
	IM @ Lab	Can	Communicating	15:23:30	
	E-Mail	Can	Standby	00:00:00	
	NetMeeting @ Lab	Can	Standby	08:50:00	
	FileTransfer @ Office	Can't	Standby	11:53:40	
	Telephone @ Office	Can't	Standby	14:33:10	Busy
	Telephone @ Lab	Can	Requested	10:13:20	
	Voicemail	Can	Standby	00:00:00	

Fig. 20

Group DB				
User Name	Name	Link	Priority	Preference Information
User A	Messaging	IM @ Office	1	nkawa: IM @ Office or IM @ Office [sic]
		IM @ Lab	2	kohda: Email
		E-Mail	3	ohno: IM @ Office or IM @ Lab
NetMeeting	NetMeeting @ Lab		1	
	NetMeeting	FileTransfer @ Office	1	
	Telephone	Telephone @ Office	1	nkawa: Telephone @ Office or Telephone @ Office [sic]
		Telephone @ Lab	2	kohda: Telephone @ Office or Telephone @ Office [sic]
		Voicemail	3	ohno: Telephone @ Office or Telephone @ Office

FIG. 21

Communication means	Message
IM @Lab	I'm here.
Telephone @ Lab	Busy
⋮	⋮

Fig. 22

Communication means	Communication contents	Start time	End time	Originator
IM @ Office	We decided the payment date will be 4/28.	2000/04/22/15/58	2000/04/22/15/58	User B

Fig. 23

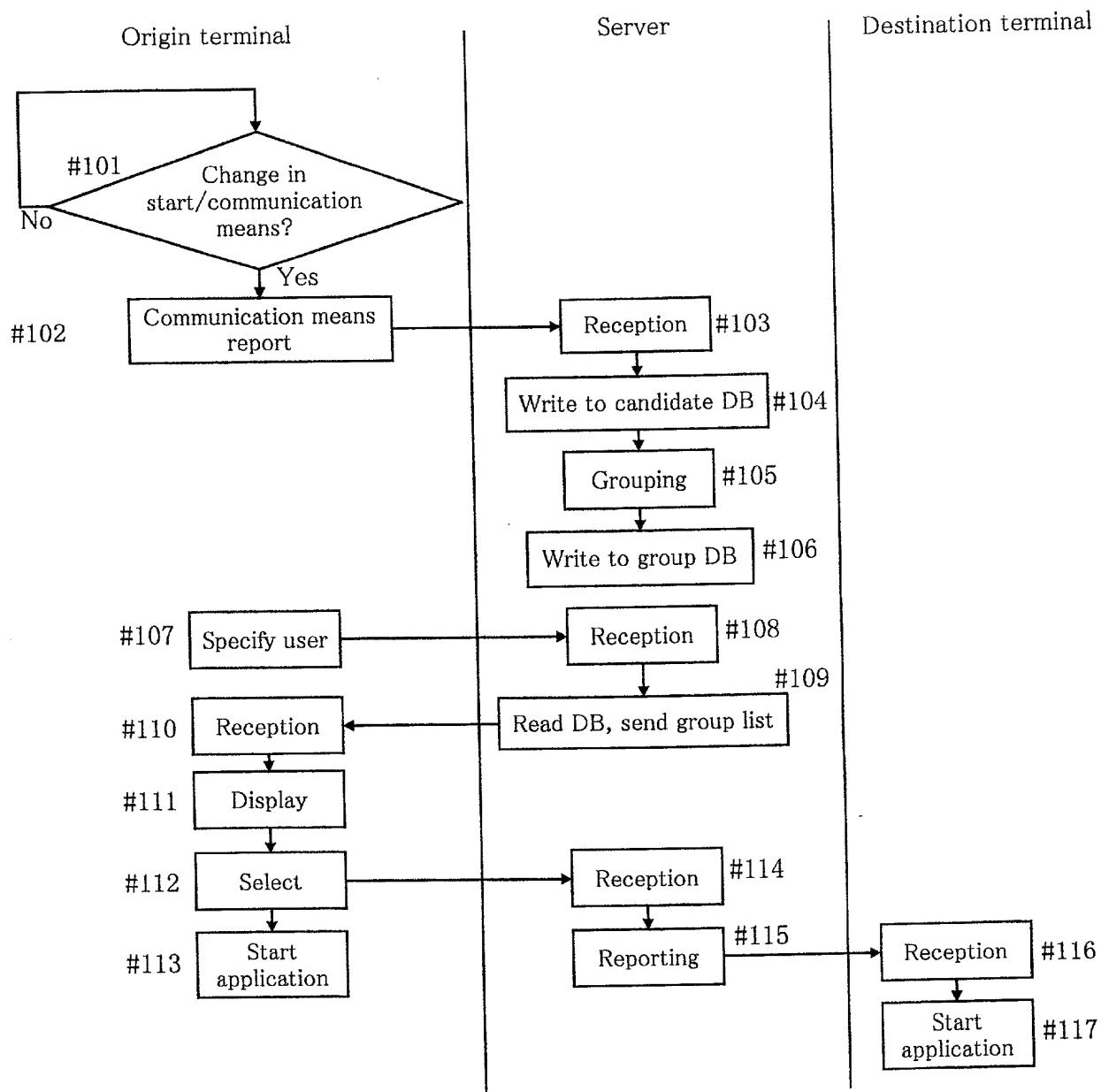


Fig. 24

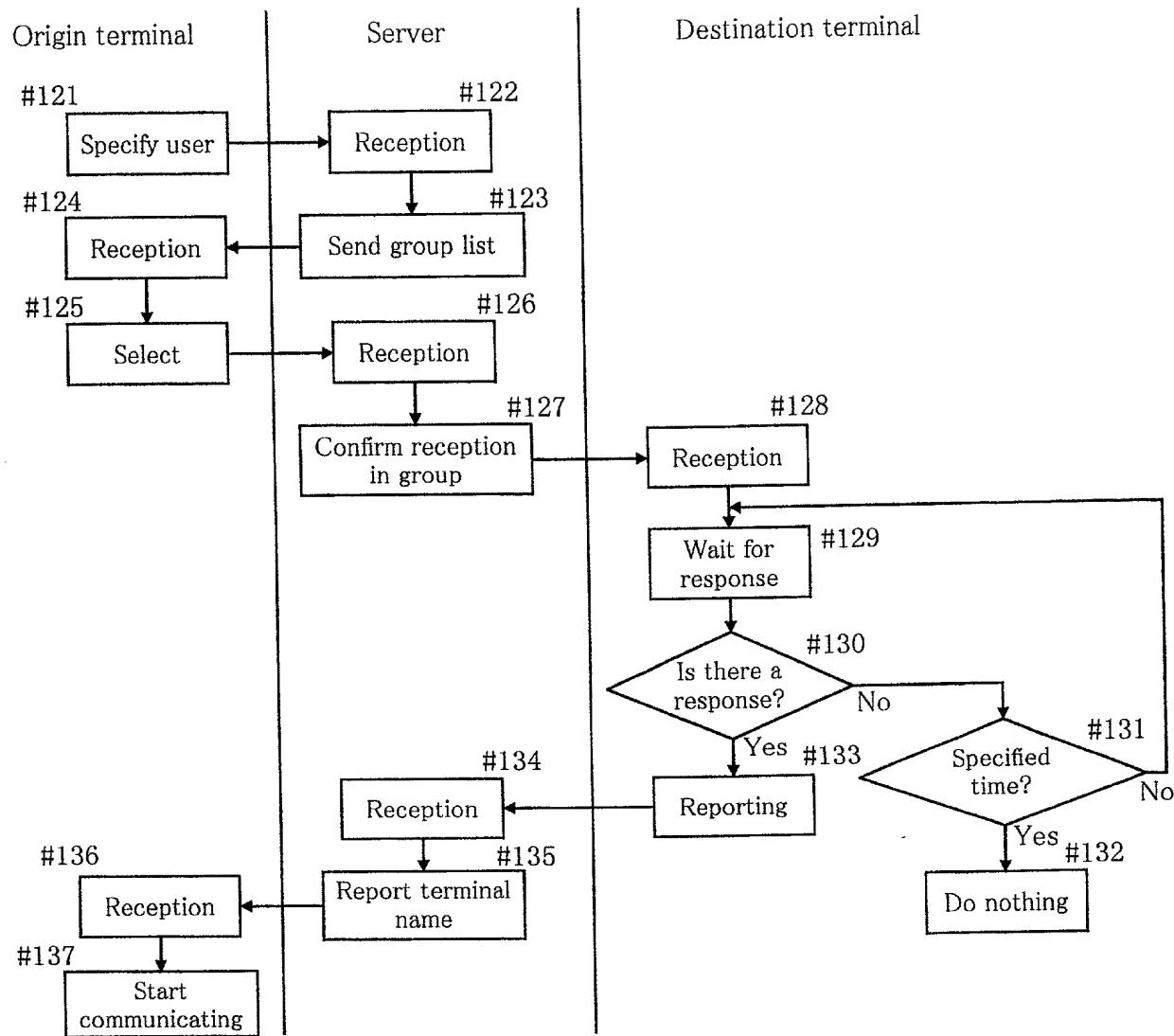
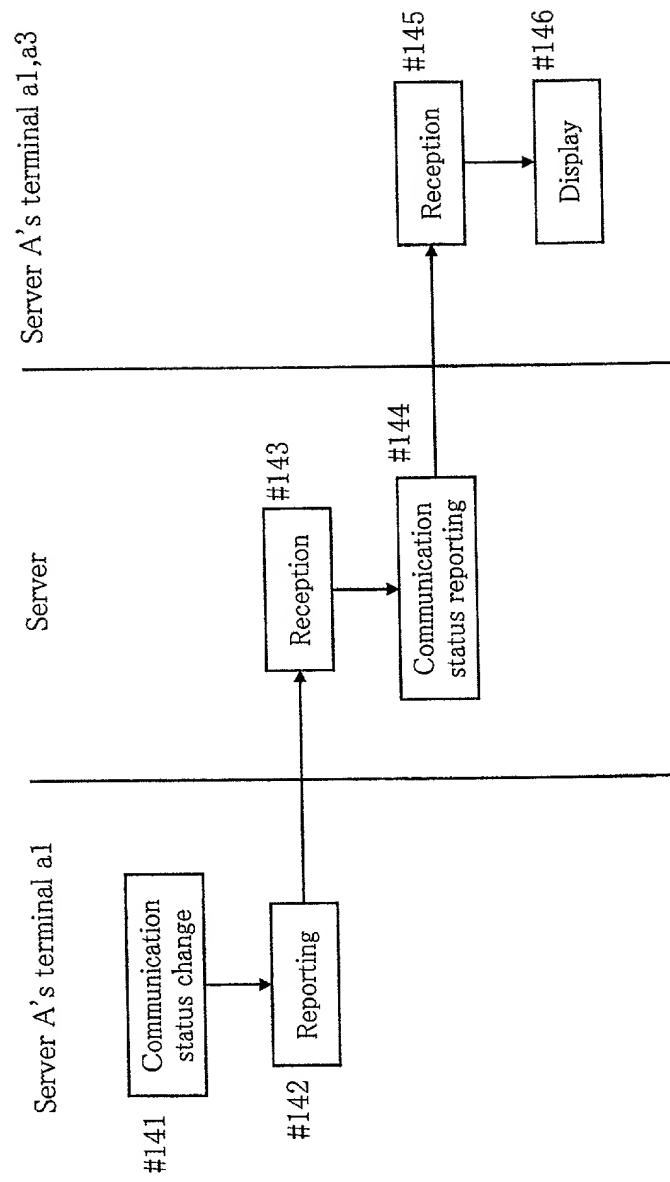


Fig. 25

Fig. 26



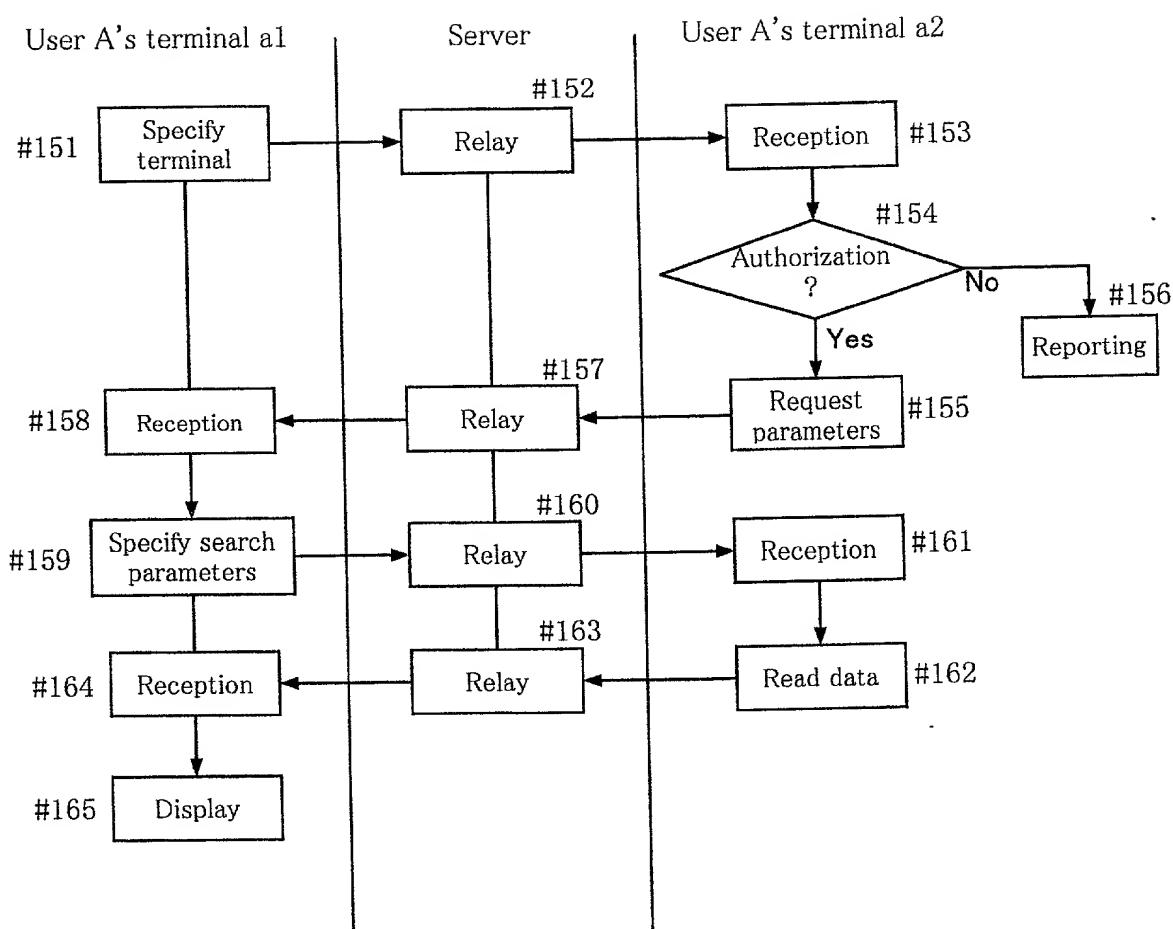
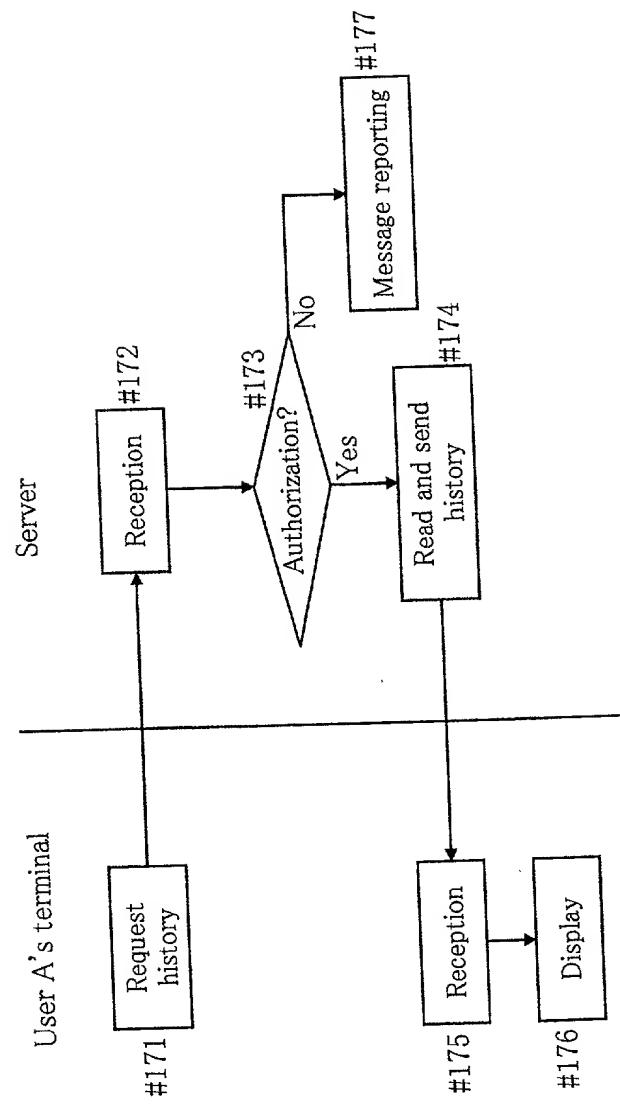


Fig. 27

Fig. 28



Declaration and Power of Attorney For Patent Application

特許出願宣言書及び委任状

Japanese Language Declaration

日本語宣言書

下記の氏名の発明者として、私は以下通り宣言します。

As a below named Inventor, I hereby declare that:

私の住所、私書箱、国籍は下記の私の氏名の後に記載された通りです。

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated next to my name.

下記の名称の発明について請求範囲に記載され、特許出願している発明内容について、私が最初かつ唯一の発明者（下記の氏名が一つの場合）もしくは最初かつ共同発明者であると（下記の名称が複数の場合）信じています。

COMMUNICATION MEANS NOTIFICATION

METHOD AND NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

the specification of which is attached hereto unless the following box is checked:

was filed on _____
as United States Application Number or
PCT International Application Number

and was amended on
_____ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56.

私は、特許請求範囲を含む上記訂正後の明細書を検討し、内容を理解していることをここに表明します。

私は、連邦規則法典第37編第1条56項に定義されるおり、特許資格の有無について重要な情報を開示する義務があることを認めます。

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私は、米国法典第35編119条(a)-(d)項又は365条(b)項に基き下記の、米国以外の国の少なくとも一ヵ国を指定している特許協力条約365(a)項に基づく国際出願、又は外国での特許出願もしくは発明者証の出願についての外国優先権をここに主張するとともに、優先権を主張している、本出願の前に出願された特許または発明者証の外国出願を以下に、枠内をマークすることで、示しています。

Prior Foreign Application(s)

外国での先行出願	Japan
11-297829	
(Number) (番号)	(Country) (国名)
2000-129702	Japan

(Number) (番号)	(Country) (国名)
------------------	-------------------

私は、第35編米国法典119条(e)項に基いて下記の米国特許出願規定に記載された権利をここに主張いたします。

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
-----------------------------	------------------------

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
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私は、下記の米国法典第35編120条に基いて下記の米国特許出願に記載された権利、又は米国を指定している特許協力条約365条(c)に基づく権利をここに主張します。また、本出願の各請求範囲の内容が米国法典第35編112条第1項又は特許協力条約で規定された方法で先行する米国特許出願に開示されていない限り、その先行米国出願書提出日以降で本出願書の日本国内または特許協力条約提出日までの期間中に入手された、連邦規則法典第37編1条56項で定義された特許資格の有無に関する重要な情報について開示義務があることを認識しています。

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
-----------------------------	------------------------

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
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私は、私自身の知識に基づいて本宣言書中で私が行なう表明が真実であり、かつ私の入手した情報と私の信じるところに基づく表明が全て真実であると信じていること、さらに故意になされた虚偽の表明及びそれと同等の行為は米国法典第18編第1001条に基づき、罰金または拘禁、もしくはその両方により処罰されること、そしてそのような故意による虚偽の声明を行なえば、出願した、又は既に許可された特許の有効性が失われることを認識し、よってここに上記のごとく宣誓を致します。

I hereby claim foreign priority under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119 (a)-(d) or 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or 365(a) of any PCT International application which designated at least one country other than the United States, listed below and have also identified below, by checking the box, any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or PCT International application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Priority Not Claimed

優先権主張なし

20/10/99	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Day/Month/Year Filed) (出願年月日)	<input type="checkbox"/>
28/04/00	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Day/Month/Year Filed) (出願年月日)	<input type="checkbox"/>

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
-----------------------------	------------------------

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code Section 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT International filing date of application.

(Status: Patented, Pending, Abandoned) (現況: 特許許可済、係属中、放棄済)

(Status: Patented, Pending, Abandoned) (現況: 特許許可済、係属中、放棄済)

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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委任状： 私は下記の発明者として、本出願に関する一切の手続を米特許商標局に対して遂行する弁理士または代理人として、下記の者を指名いたします。（弁護士、または代理人の氏名及び登録番号を明記のこと）

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唯一または第一発明者名

Full name of sole or first inventor

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発明者の署名

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Date

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(第三以降の共同発明者についても同様に記載し、署名をすること)

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Japanese Language Declaration

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		Full name of sixth joint inventor, if any
日付		Sixth Inventor's signature
住所		Residence
国籍		Citizenship
郵便の宛先		Post Office Address

(第六またはそれ以降の共同発明者に対して同様な情報および署名を提供すること。)

(Supply similar information and signature for third and subsequent joint inventors.)